DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 519 CS 004 787

TITLE	Proceedings of the Great Literacy Crisis Symposium, San Diego State University, October 2, 1978.
INSTITUTION	San Diego State Univ., Calif.
SPONS AGENCY	National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	2 Oct 78
NOTE	53p.; Sponsored in part by the California Council for the Humanities in Public Policy
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Literacy; *Educational Problems; Educational Trends; *Literacy; *Literacy Education; Mass Media; *Public Opinion; *Public Policy; Test Validity

ABSTRACT

The "Great Literacy Crisis" Symposium was convened at San Diego State University to ascertain what scholarship reveals about literacy and whether that scholarship influences the public's perception of the issue. Topics discussed included the following: the effect of the literacy crisis on the professions; the reality or illusory nature of the literacy crisis; the informative value of literacy test scores; and the effect of public ideas about literacy on the making of public policy. The following questions were also addressed: how literacy is defined; how the medium of literacy is defined; how literacy is measured; the effects of the literacy crisis on public policy; the effects of the crisis on people's lives; the involvement of the media with these issues; whether the crisis is real; if it is real, how it is to be handled; if it is not real, how this fact can be made known; and the role of humanists in this area. (The conference materials provided to participants are included in the appendix.) (DP)

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ED169519

PROCEEDINGS

of

THE GREAT LITERACY CRISIS SYMPOSIUM

October 2, 1978
San Diego State University

Under the auspices of a grant from the
California Council for the Humanities in Public Policy
and the
National Endowment for the Humanities

C SO04 787

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

(Dr. Richard Rush, Department of English & Comparative Literature - San Diego State University)

I would like to welcome you today on behalf of San Diego State University, the California Council for the Humanities in Public Policy, and the San Diego State Linguistics Students Association, to a discussion of the "Great Literacy Crisis."

I have two announcements before we begin the program proper. The first is to identify, for those of you who are unfamiliar with the agency, the California Council for the Humanities in Public Policy. This is the California arm of the National Endowment for the Humanities; and the National Endowment funds issues such as this through local and statewide agencies, as a means of bringing together the best in scholarship and community opinion. We are very grateful to the California Council for finding this issue to be of importance to the community, and for funding this project.

The other announcement has to do with the evaluation of the conference. Dr. Rebecca Bryson will be handling the evaluation, and there will be forms available here today for that purpose. In the event that you won't be able to participate for the entire day, we ask you please to fill out one of the evaluation forms before leaving; they will be by the doors this morning. It's necessary for us to see the effect of this kind of conference, and to give some feedback to the Council for use in planning future conferences of this sort.

By way of introducing this issue, I might say that we are currently witnessing two phenomena. The first is the passing of the traditional humanistic ideal of the "literate gentleman," conversant with and effective in the use of the written word as a habit of life. The second is the appearance on the contemporary scene of a reading public which (according to the most recent reports) is more extensive than ever before, at least in the numbers of books and other publications purchased, and--presumably--read. The contrasts inherent in these phenomena set the stage for our discussion today.

Public education on all levels--primary, secondary, university--has been perceived as not producing students possessed of a critical awareness of the world of ideas; who do not hold and are unused to effective articulation as a goal; and who--some say--are unaware of the broad cultural inheritance which former generations had participated in. This indeed may be a literacy crisis; but certainly it is on somewhat different terms from what we will discuss today.

However, this issue is a broader one than the simple decision as to whether an individual can read or write. The term "literacy" in this sense is a cultural question, different from essential reading and writing. Taken in this sense, literacy implies a question of whether an individual is educated: that is, can think independently and critically at his or her age level. It also implies a question of breadth: has an individual been exposed to issues of substance which pertain to mature human life? In this context, literacy signifies the ability to read and write on a certain cultural level (activities which are inseparable, for the effective demonstration of one requires the other.) And yet very often, when the term "literacy" is used in

general discussions, it is not the ability to read and write which is at issue, but whether or not one is truly educated in this sense of being aware of a cultural inheritance. I think it is important to state the implications of this at the outset, so that in the discussions which go on today it is clear exactly what the issue is.

Broadly, then, there have been two general interpretations of the current literacy question. On the one hand, standardized test scores show a decline in reading ability. (I might add nonetheless that only last week the SAT showed that this year's test scores are no lower than last year's--as a matter of fact, they are about on a par.) The resultant judgment from this perceived decline is that students do not read, or write, as well as previously, and thus are tending to be functional illiterates.

At the other pole, there is an interpretation that indicates that standardized test scores are misleading, because the tests themselves are arbitrarily narrow in scope, and do not accurately gauge what they set out to estimate. Especially, this is seen in the failure to test minority skills in a pertinent or significant way. But I want to add that today we are not going to focus on the minority student--or second language--issue. This is something which is an entire concern in itself, something which is beyond the scope of our discussion today. What we want to focus on is what scholarship can tell us about literacy, and whether that scholarship is influencing the public's perception of the issue. To this end, then, we have brought together a number of people who have familiarity with and expertise in the issue of literacy.

> Our first speaker is a person who is uniquely situated to comment upon literacy. Mr. Alfred Jacoby is Assistant to the Editor of the San Diego Union and is also Reader Representative of the Union. As a representative of a profession which deals with the written word, and also as an individual who sees community response in writing to the written word in the news forum, Mr. Jacoby is conversant with professional expertise as well as community literacy. Mr. Alfred Jacoby:

IS THE LITERACY CRISIS AFFECTING THE PROFESSIONS?

(Mr. Alfred Jacoby, Assistant to the Editor/Readers Representative - The San Diego Union)

Some months ago, in a piece about the fact that illiteracy was causing some problems for the Navy, a Los Angeles Times writer said:

> Functional illiteracy is defined as the inability to read a newspaper, write a letter, address an envelope, read and understand a Help Wanted ad or newspaper grocery ad, or to read and understand simple instructions or signs.

What that comes down to is--how many people do we have out on our freeways who don't understand signs that say "SLOW TO 55" or "MERGE LEFT" or "THRU TRAFFIC MERGE LEFT"--"through" of course being misspelled.

We may be rearing a whole generation, a whole series of generations, of children who believe that the Chicago Tribune was right in its attempt to have simplified spelling back in the 20's and 30's, and that "through" is always spelled "t-h-r-u," and that "road" is spelled "r-d," and that "BLVD" means "boulevard." I can understand why we have accidents on our freeways if we apparently have a great number of people who can't read the signs.

First of all, is there a problem? I think there's a problem! We've all been talking about the literacy problem for as long as anyone can recall, for at least the last hundred years or so. Mark Twain, our most vaunted and finest writer, talked about the literacy problem, worried about the literacy problem, and yet was able to write in the most literate way using the finest examples of the American idiom.

Yes, it exists. That's the de facto world in which we live. We even have a day dedicated to it--September 8th was International Literacy Day. That's the final evolvement, I suppose, of the American Dream--to have a day named after literacy, or the lack of it.

On that particular day, as it happens, Senator George McGovern, a former college professor, spoke to the question of literacy in this country, and some of its problems. He suggested in the course of things that we even have a National Commission on Literacy.

But first, some of the examples Senator McGovern, through his staff, discovered about literacy in this country. In 1977, Senator McGovern said, actually 1 out of 10 students about to graduate from high school was still incapable of doing basic everyday reading tasks. Among poorer segments of the population more than 1 in 5 cannot read at a basic level as high school graduation approaches. Even many prospective teachers, Senator McGovern continued, are not truly literate. In 1976, for example, one-third of the applicants for teaching jobs failed an 8th grade general knowledge test in Florida. (Florida is generally cited, I might add parenthetically, as one of the best areas in the South to get a college education.) Senator McGovern cited Dr. Norvell Northcutt, Director of the Adult Performance Level Project, who had defined three levels of functional competency. At the lowest level, Dr. Northcutt points out, the functional incompetent cannot effectively read a want ad, fill out a job application, or perform simple computational tasks. By this standard, 16% of the whites, 44% of the Blacks, and 56% of Spanish-surnamed adults are functionally incompetent. And of course illiteracy and incompetency have to be put together. McGovern also pointed out that illiteracy is not really a problem of the poor and the less educated; colleges and universities complain that 1 out of 4 incoming freshmen needs remedial help in reading and writing. The University of California, which we have always believed in this state to be one of the finest state universities in the world, found that 75% of the state's top high school students failed a nationally-used English Composition test in 1975.

Wrapping it all up, McGovern said that 30 million adult Americans are functionally incompetent and that 20 million Americans above the age of 16 cannot read well enough to understand a want ad.

What does all this mean? These incompetents, these illiterates, swell our unemployment lines; they fill our prisons and our drug treatment centers. Instead of becoming taxpayers, they become tax-eaters, at an annual public cost near 6 billion dollars.

Something is very wrong with American education, Senator McGovern said. What good does it do to spend 130 billion dollars a year to defend our nation militarily, when the citizens we seek to protect are ill-equipped to function educationally in the world they live in and work in every day?

Now, in anticipation of what I suspect will be a prime matter of discussion as the morning goes on, I must say that I find it difficult to accept the current attacks on testing methods. It doesn't really make any difference whether you call an apple an orange, or a kumquat, or anything else; it is still a certain kind of fruit. The fruit itself doesn't change. To put it on another level, it doesn't make any difference whether you find out you're pregnant in a doctor's office using a simple urine test, or you find out you're pregnant by discovering that the menstrual periods have ended, or that you find out you're pregnant by--after nine months--having a baby. You're still pregnant, and the problem--or the joy, in the case of pregnancy--is still there.

Whether the testing methods are right or wrong isn't really the point at issue. It seems to me that whether the teaching is right or wrong is the point at issue. To evade that point is only to put off the inevitable question of how are we going to solve this problem? It seems to me that it is appalling, in the case of minorities, for instance, to say that "Well, the reason the Blacks don't pass standard tests is that you don't put enough Black experience into the testing equipment." That's very true, you don't; but you're also, in giving that statement, ignoring the fact that this is a white middle-class world in which we live, and we don't seem to be doing enough to teach our people to live in that white middle-class world...at least, in the homogenized America into which we seem to be tumbling at great speed in these last 25 years.

If you don't think the nation has changed into a white middle-class homogenized world, consider what a hamburger tasted like 25 years ago in this country, and what a hamburger tastes like today. Everywhere in this country today, a hamburger tastes like a MacDonald's hamburger. 25 years ago you could get good hamburgers and you could get bad hamburgers; but at least there was some variety. We have brought the low level of hamburgers up to the MacDonald's level, and many of us see this country going into a homogenized MacDonald's level of hamburger and life, brought on by the interstate highway system and television, both of which have improved--and yet, in my opinion, downgraded--the quality of life in this country.

What does this mean? Let me give you a recent example supplied by a leading educator at a middle-class community college here in Southern California. Consider, too, the wonderful metamorphosis in the name of these two-year colleges. Some 30 years ago, when I was a student at Long Beach Junior College, it was a "junior" college. Then they became "city" colleges. Now, they are "community" colleges. Essentially, so far as I can tell, they remain about the same, but the

name keeps changing. It may be there's some sort of message about our testing techniques in that.

But consider these figures...in this particular middle-class community college here in Southern California, in the last two years, some 4,000 students have been tested using a standard Nelson/Denney testing technique. 30.2% of these 4,000 students scored in the seriously-impaired reading class, in the 17th percentile or lower. What that meant was that 75% of the texts were beyond the range of more that 50% of the students at this particular community college.

What is the solution? Some would say, "Why, lower the expectations! Lower the texts! Make the classes simpler!" Others, I hope, will say "Let's find better ways of teaching, let's make our expectations greater." In the long run, it'll make for a more literate country.

What does all this mean to the professions? It means in journalism that we virtually have to teach basic grammar to a good many of our young reporters. It means we have to do things like teach the various forms of "its," for example. We have to time and again explain the rule of the pronoun antecedents, and apparently nobody's teaching that rule on most of our television stations, because over and over again I find myself shouting back at the television newscasters when they say "The San Diego Padres, they are doing this, they are doing that..." And you think, "My God! This incredible news function is telling everybody how to talk bad!"

We have the feeling that the other professions have the same problem. We hear that many, many doctors (doctors who spend a great deal of their lives learning scientific functions) don't spend very much time learning the English functions. Consider this note from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor (this was in financial management, I should add) of the San Diego campus of the University of California:

> Effective July 1, 1978, systemwide administration has allowed the campus to permanentize the allocation of the university opportunity funds which were previously restricted to temporary or current-year-only allocations.

I think that sentence means "From now on, you can get your money every year instead of asking for it from time to time."

Finally, what did Senator McGovern, in his speech on International Literacy Day, have to say--and what did he recommend?

He wanted to see formed a National Commission on Literacy. Another agency. He felt that this federal agency should be very independent, and particularly independent of what is referred to as "the educational establishment." He recommended that this commission be completely independent of the National Institute for Education. He felt that it had to study the possibility or the desirability in the content of competency centers. He felt that this commission should evaluate current programs and explore possible innovations to raise the levels of literacy. He felt that this commission should consider alternative solutions outside the traditional school setting. And

finally, he felt that the commission should analyze the effectiveness of the current federal assistance in combating illiteracy, and the effect of different formulas for distributing such funds.

These are all wonderful recommendations. I am sure that Senator McGovern had no expectation that they would be fulfilled, not in the era of tax reform and Howard Jarvis.

Unfortunately, until the public is once again convinced that our society is right, the Howard Jarvises will continue to flourish. And that society includes education, too.

Thank you.

Dr. Rush: Thank you, Mr. Jacoby.

Our second speaker this morning is Dr. Suzette Elgin, from San Diego State University. Dr. Elgin is Associate Professor of Linguistics and is widely published in linguistics, as well as a published novelist. Mr. Jacoby has raised a number of issues and cited statistics in support of the existence of a literacy crisis; Dr. Elgin will respond on the topic: "Is the Literacy Crisis Real?" Dr. Suzette Elgin:

IS THE LITERACY CRISIS REAL?

(Dr. Suzette Elgin, linguist and author - San Diego State University)

This morning, because the topic we are dealing with is so broad in scope, and because our time is so limited, I intend to focus on a single aspect of our larger question: what are literacy tests, and all their standardized kin, <u>for</u>? That is, what function or functions do they serve in American society today that makes them worth the enormous expenditure of time, energy and money that they demand of us all?

We can begin our discussion of this question by thinking briefly of a set of very dismal statistics. It is by no means complete; it is by no means unflawed. However, it represents a set of real world facts for which even a very broad margin of error would not make any significant change in the situation--therefore, it is usable in today's context.

The proportion of minority citizens in the United States today varies from source to source, depending upon one's definition of a "minority" and upon a number of other factors. It can be set conservatively at 20%--one fifth of our national population. In California the figure passes one third, with the most recent statistic being 34.7%. Beside this we must set another figure: that the average representation of minority citizens in any of those careers or

professions for which Governor Brown tells us that psychic income is available is only 4%--and that is the average figure.

To find this statistical proportion reversed, one must look at the figures for food service workers, domestic workers, prison inmates, and classes for the mentally retarded.

Now--how have we accomplished this?

Not, certainly, by chance. The odds against such a bizarre distribution are wildly improbable. Certainly not by law. Our Constitution would not allow us to have a law which said that minority representation in the professions must at no time rise above an average figure of 4%.

Nevertheless, we have accomplished precisely the same results as would such a law--or such a bizarre coincidence of improbabilities--and there is no sign of a trend toward change. On the contrary, the firm grip of the Anglo upon the upper socioeconomic levels of American society tightens with each passing year. No clear statistics are available for my own minority group--the Ozark and Appalachian poor whites--but there is ample evidence that they fare little better than the "recognized" minorities in this regard. We are perhaps simply less colorful.

The mechanism we have devised to ensure that there shall be no change in the composition of the upper classes in America is based not on improbable skews and squiggles in the graphs but on the firm foundation of the Sacred Bell Curve. That mechanism is the literacy tests, and all their cousins--the GRE, the LCAT, the MCAT, the Bar exam, and so on ad infinitum. From the very first test in circling the bunny that is different from all the other bunnies, straight on through to the uppermost levels of the academic, technical and professional worlds, the standardized tests serve this function. As Professor Bruce Cooper of Dartmouth College said, in the Los Angeles Times for September 12th of this year, these tests are "fulfilling a major 'sorting function' in our society." (And since I don't speak Standard English, I'll spell that word for you--it's "s-o-r-t-i-n-g," "sorting.") His perspective on this differs somewhat from my own, since he finds this "sorting" function so admirable that he advocates a nationwide single test of literacy for one and all. And it is somewhat astonishing to find his statement written right out in black and white like that, rather than peeking through between the lines in its usual fashion. But I agree wholeheartedly with his assessment of what the tests are accomplishing.

Now I would not want you to think I stand here today advocating illiterate judges and doctors and chemists and engineers and atomic physicists, much less incompetent ones. My personal familiarity with such testing instruments as State Medical Board Examinations does not equip me to speak of their limitations--if limitations there be--with any degree of assurance. I will therefore further narrow the focus of my remarks to those tests at the level of the GRE and below, with which I am depressingly familiar.

We define literacy today as the ability to pass the literacy tests. This might not be circular; it depends entirely on what our tests tell us. Let us consider that for a moment.

They tell us whether an individual, faced with four words--"lie/lay/-laid/lain"--will be able to choose among the four in accordance with the handbooks. They do not tell us if he or she is honest or compassionate or conscientious.

They tell us whether an individual knows that nice people don't say "irregardless," and whether he can use the "neither/nor" construction properly. They do not tell us if he or she is talented or creative or hard-working.

They tell us whether someone can, under stress, in a hot room and in an uncomfortable chair, with his car illegally parked and his children in the care of he-knows-not-whom, produce five paragraphs on some gripping subject such as "How I Have Changed"--and do that well enough to please half a dozen English teachers. They do not tell us whether this person would be an inspiration to others and an asset to a chosen field of work.

They tell us whether an individual has mastered that quaint and curious dialect--Standard Written Academic English--which no living human being speaks, and almost nobody writes, and which the vast majority of us (myself emphatically included) could not possibly maintain for any length of time unless we were reading aloud from a manuscript prepared in advance and faithfully adhered to.

They tell us whether the individual is willing to accept, in the name of "correctness," such barbarisms as "The winners were he and we." They do not tell us whether he or she has good taste, or appreciates clarity and elegance and vitality of expression.

Above all, they tell us whether the individual is skilled at test-TAKING, that skill of all skills. I am highly skilled at test-taking myself, and for that reason I can ordinarily pass the tests--but only if I cheat. By this I do not mean the sort of cheating that goes with writing down the answers on one's cuff. What I mean is that I can pass those tests only if I firmly ignore what I do in all honesty consider to be the correct answers, and concentrate instead on supplying what I know from experience that the test writers <u>want</u> me to select.

The tests do not, I submit, tell us anything useful about literacy. A literate person is one who reads and writes with such ease, and such pleasure, that he or she would not willingly give up reading and writing as a part of daily life. None of our tests will identify such a person for us.

It is high time it was pointed out that the perceptual and cognitive processes required for reading <u>Jaws</u>, <u>Skateboard World</u>, and <u>The National Enquirer</u>, are <u>exactly</u> the same as those required for reading Henry James, the <u>Atlantic Monthly</u>, and <u>The New York Times</u>. The literacy tests do not measure <u>whether</u> one reads, nor what one might be willing to read if given the opportunity--they measure what one has already read. In the young, this is largely a matter of chance and local school board policy...and of how many hours (since Jarvis-Gann came along) the public libraries are open.

The major function of the literacy tests is therefore that of a filter--a socioeconomic filter, of remarkable efficiency and alleged legality. As the statistics show us, they serve that function well.

But that is not their only function. They have yet another role, which may interact with the first and affect it in ways that perhaps we had never anticipated.

They are, I am firmly convinced, creating a literacy crisis. A real literacy crisis Not the one we pay lip service to here today, but an authentic one hundred proof guaranteed unmistakable literacy crisis, a pile-up of nominalizations which Edwin Newman would faint away to hear. By tying literacy inextricably to tension, to stress, to unpleasantness, to crisis, to pressure, to negative labelling--you realize, I hope, that we have the arrogance to tell people that we are engaged in DIAGNOSING their DEFICIENCIES in order that we may prescribe REMEDIES for them?--in this fashion we are creating an entire generation of young people who are learning to despise and to abhor everything connected in any way, no matter how tenuous, with either reading or writing.

There is an algorithm for the creation of a Literacy Crisis, and it has six simple steps.

STEP ONE: Constantly impress upon students, using all available media both in and out of the classroom, that the whole country knows them to be illiterate, ignorant, incompetent, unsatisfactory, not up to community standards, and a waste of the taxpayers' dollars.

STEP TWO: As one measure of literacy, administer multiple choice exams composed of 50% nit-pickeries such as the requirement for nominative case pronouns in predicate position, and 50% utterly obvious throwaways,a technique which can be relied upon to produce the Bell Curve about which our entire educational system revolves.

STEP THREE: As your second literacy measure, have students write an essay over a question so badly worded and so boring that no sane individual not under threat of remedial courses could be forced to write even a sentence about it, and be sure this is done under the most miserable possible physical conditions. Incomprehensible instructions and squads of grim test monitors help greatly with Step Three.

STEP FOUR: Be certain that all tests, including their instructions, are written in a language mode required only in the academic environment and the Mary Worth comic strip. Ideally, the student or prospective employee should be tested in a mode that he or she has never encountered before anywhere. Fortunately, a number of the standardized tests in use offer us this convenient feature.

STEP FIVE: When defining "readability," base it upon formulas which rely upon such matters as the number of syllables in words, and sets of archaic vocabulary lists. Be very careful to ignore the fact that "locomotive" is as long a word as "psychomachoea," and scrupulously exclude from your data for compilation of vocabulary lists analyses of Rolling Stone, The Lord of the Rings, New Times, Surfing Magazine, or any other publication that young people might actually have read.

STEP SIX: Finally, at the slightest indication that some teacher might--through ignorance or hazard--have taught all of his or her students how to do those things needed for reading with pleasure and writing with ease, scream GRADE INFLATION! After all, such a teacher would have to give all A's, and we all know where that leads. It

certainly does not lead to massive federal grants for remediation, nor to massive sales of newspapers or advertising along the lines of "He'll cost us $21 thousand dollars to educate and he won't even know how to read or write."

People who know full well that they are both competent and literate, but who find that their failure to remember the answer to the "lie/-lay/laid/lain" conundrum invalidates that competency and literacy, reach a point at which they say "All right, then, the hell with your reading and writing!" They are tired of wearing the Literacy Leper's Bell around their necks, and the Scarlet I across their breasts; and one can only respect them for that, while one mourns it. Enough is enough, and more than enough.

It is <u>this</u> new generation who will be the teachers of the academic generation to follow. And then we will have our literacy crisis in earnest, and those who have been claiming that there was one these past 100 years will be able to say "We told you so," and will perhaps at last be satisfied.

I will close by adding my own voice to the many others asking for a total moratorium on all standardized testing--at least at the college level and below--for a period of 3 to 5 years. I truly do not believe that our educational system or our economy would collapse as a result of such a breathingspace, despite the profit losses for the giant testing industry and the media. This would give us time. Time which the inexorable schedule of the give-the-test, score-the-test, give-the-test-again, does not allow us. It would give us a chance to decide what we are really testing, and why, and to find out whether the 'sorting' function now served by the tests is one that is moral just because it is legal, and whether we want, as a nation, to lend it our continued support.

If we are not willing to go that far, then let us at least take one simple step--nationwide. Let us insist that every instructor who requires that his or her students pass these tests, and every employer who makes the same demands of his or her employees, <u>also</u> be required to take the tests in question under--as far as is possible--the same standardized miserable conditions. It seems no more than justice to me that we only ask something of others if we know we can do it ourselves--and where these tests are concerned, we do <u>not</u> know that. It seems no more than common sense that we only require something of others when we know from personal--and recent--experience what is it that we are requiring. Where these tests are concerned, we cannot meet this criterion.

Either of these two actions, or best of all, both of them, with the administration of the tests to academics and professionals taking place as the first phase of the moratorium, might provide us with a revelation or two. It might even, if we proceeded immediately, forestall the <u>Real</u> Great Literacy Crisis that is otherwise as inevitable as tomorrow's sunrise.

Thank you.

Dr. Rush: Thank you, Dr. Elgin.

Our third speaker this morning is Dr. James Popham, from UCLA. Dr. Popham is a recognized expert on testing, and he will speak to us this morning on what tests scores tell us. Dr. James Popham:

WHAT DO TEST SCORES TELL US?

(Dr. James Popham, Professor of Higher Education - UCLA)

A panel discussion usually permits a degree of interaction among the participants, but I see the time schedule here doesn't permit that, so I'm going to take advantage of this opportunity. The first two speakers have delivered some interesting remarks. I find that they disagree with each other, and I am in substantial disagreement with both of them. So, it would be delightful to interact a bit.

Mr. Jacoby suggests that the allegation that the tests aren't doing a good job in telling us whether people are literate or not is not a very sensible assertion, and that--like pregnancy--we can simply find out whether, in fact, people <u>are</u> literate. It seems to me that whether one is pregnant or not is certainly incontestable...at least in advanced stages...but that is <u>not</u> the case with respect to a variety of things we are trying to measure, one of them being literacy.

I found Dr. Elgin's delightful diatribe against testing somewhat excessive. I find tests are reprehensible, too, but her proposal that we have a temporary moratorium on testing strikes me as running the risk of "permanentizing" the death of tests. It seems to me that there are improvements to be made rather than simply chucking the whole lot out, even though tests suffer from many deficits.

My focus was supposed to be on testing...it was already treated very adequately. But the title is "What <u>Do</u> the Tests Tell Us About Literacy?"

It seems to me that tests <u>can</u> tell us what the current situation is, and with any luck they can tell us what <u>ought</u> to be. Unfortunately, both of those messages become very much garbled, depending upon our sophistication in the use of tests. And I'd like to deal with both of those questions: that is, the current status of literacy in the United States, and how we can improve that status through the use of testing.

As you probably know, as of last week 36 states in our nation have enacted regulations, or state laws, which require students to display minimum skills--minimum competency--in reading, writing, and math, usually, in order to secure a high school diploma. In California we have had our law for a couple of years now, and it's local determination--what's done in San Diego may be different from what's done in L.A.--but essentially kids, within a couple of years, will have to display a minimum prowess in literacy of a sort, a very reduced sort, in order to get a high school diploma.

This kind of movement, sweeping the country in the past two or three years, is an astonishing phenomenon, really, and clearly conveys a public indictment of the quality of education. The public, through its elected representatives, is telling school folks that you have not done a good job, that there are too many people who are getting out of school who cannot read and write as we wish them to read and write. In that regard, they are relying almost exclusively on test performances to yield the evidence. This is an evidence-oriented game, and the public is no longer willing to accept glib reassurances from superintendents regarding whether or not kids can read or write.

The problem is that when we rely on the typical kinds of tests that are employed to demonstrate literacy, we rely on measures devised for a different purpose and which are therefore inappropriate for the function we are asking them to serve.

Just a moment or two of history, because it is true that in this country we have a remarkably refined technology of educational measurement. There is no better in the world. And it started in World War I when psychologists, borrowing some of the methods of Binet, decided that they could serve the nation by isolating tests which would separate individuals according to their ability to serve as officers in the military. We had to win the war, save the society, and the idea of these psychologists was to spread examinees out--military personnel out--so we could find out the ones who would be best and who would thus become effective officers. And they devised some very effective tests during that period--group tests--the Army Alpha being one which was administered to well over one million two hundred and fifty thousand men. And the tests worked rather well. They could spread examinees out. The people who did very well were sent to officer training programs, the people who did average were sent to the trenches, and the people who did very badly were sent to college administration training programs.

But these tests soon became annointed. They had all sorts of validity and reliability coefficients associated with them. They came to us professionally printed from fine organizations, from such centers of cerebral excellence as Princeton, New Jersey. What possible harm could emerge from Princeton, New Jersey? And they became known as "nationally standardized" tests, and that, too, made them impervious to criticism. As a consequence, a good many people began to employ these tests for purposes for which they were not designed. Remember, they were designed originally to spread examinees out, to pick the best from the worst on some kind of problem-solving test. Now, what happens, however, when you do that, is that you do not necessarily create a measure which is suitable for verifying whether an individual is literate. Two criticisms of these tests I think I will add to Dr. Elgin's, that I think are, in a way, more salient.

First, I think there are some psychometric tendencies built into these kinds of tests which render them decisively unsuitable for telling whether or not the examinee is literate. This is a point that I would not think Mr. Jacoby and a good number of American citizens are familiar with, because it is a very subtle kind of deficit which renders these tests wrong for the purposes to which they are being put.

A test that is going to prove useful for discriminating among examinees must spread out the scores; it <u>has</u> to spread out the scores. If

it doesn't spread out the scores, you cannot make the fine-grained comparisons which are at the heart of a decent test of that sort. You cannot say that Mary scored at the 85th percentile and Harriet at the 43rd and so on. You must spread scores out. Furthermore, if you do not spread scores out rather decisively, you cannot secure the high reliability coefficients which are imperative in order to sell those kinds of tests. The single most important factor in producing tests which have high reliability is a reasonable degree of response variance. To produce response variance becomes imperative for creators of traditional achievement tests.

A test item which maximizes response variance is one which is answered correctly by about 50% of the examinees. That's the item which is the best item for spreading people out. Find a test item which everyone answers correctly, and that item would have no impact at all in spreading out the examinees' performances. An item which is answered incorrectly by everyone similarly doesn't spread people out. But one that is answered correctly by half the examinees is the winner. Therefore, you push toward items which are answered correctly by about 40% to 60% of the examinees. Items which are answered correctly by a larger proportion of the examinees--let's say 80% or 90%--are systematically removed from the tests when the tests are revised, because such items are redundant for purposes of spreading out examinee performance. Those items, therefore, after a test is revised many times, are jettisoned.

However, if you think about it just a moment, you will realize that particularly on achievement tests--literacy tests, so-called--the items on which students tend to perform well will be items dealing with content teachers thought important enough to stress. The more important the content, the more stress the teacher gives that content; the more stress given, the better the students do; the better the students do, the higher the performance on the examination item, and, therefore, the less likely that the examination item will remain on the test. That means that after a while, <u>systematically</u>, you excise from the test the very items containing the most important things that we should be teaching. This is happening in standardized achievement tests to the point that these tests many times are functioning exactly like intelligence/aptitude tests; they are covering esoterica, not mainline subject.

I am not suggesting that the deficiencies in American education are a function of tests that have technical deficits. Mr. Jacoby is quite right--there are clear inadequacies in our educational program. But to some extent, using test performance as an <u>index</u> of this inadequacy is an unrealistic way to assess it.

There's a second problem that deals with the use of these kinds of tests to tell us what the current situation is; and that is that these tests are produced by commercial testing organizations that have to sell tests in order to stay in business.

Now even though they may, in some cases, as a consequence of historical legal precedents, be functioning as nonprofit agencies, they still have to sell enough tests to keep their executives in office...to keep the firm running.

By a strange artifact, in our country local curriculum policy is set by local boards, by the Boards of Education; and that results in amazing diversity across the land. That curricular diversity makes it very difficult for a test publisher who wants to sell tests to spell out precisely what the test measures. If, in fact, those tests describe precisely what they measure, what is emphasized in the reading program in San Diego may not be what is emphazied in the reading progman in Detroit, Michigan. And as a consequence, people in San Diego might say "Well, that's rather like what we're teaching here, but we're not really teaching precisely that way, so we'll look elsewhere." Therefore, test publishers describe their wares in inordinately general terms and pick up the classic Rorshach dividend of letting people see in an ink blot what they wish to.

This means that many times there are unrecognized mismatches between what is taught and what is tested. When you have that kind of unrecognized mismatch you have obviously misleading data and spurious conclusions.

What I'm suggesting is that there are deficits in the types of standardized achievement tests that we currently employ, which render our assessment of the "literacy Crisis" invalid on the basis of bad evidence.

The second point that I want to deal with is: to what extent can these tests tell us what ought to be, what should be, with respect to literacy?

I would submit to you that the impact of the tests on the curriculum is potentially dangerous. That tests signify what the public expects, and when society's expectations have been made manifest, educators in general cleave to those expectations. I had this point brought home to me most vividly a year ago... I know a few of you in the audience, and you probably know that I have spent most of my life running. I do not like to dawdle. And, therefore, through the years, in driving, whenever I have been facing a traffic light, waiting to turn left, and the people in the opposite direction have moved less than fast, I simply turn left when the light changes, without waiting for anyone. I find you can make the left without waiting for them to come across. This saves you approximately 6 to 8 seconds at a traffic signal, and over a period of 15 years I think it has saved me in the neighborhood of 47 minutes.

All right. About a year ago, I was coming home from a local chicken establishment--I'd bought dinner for the kids--and I was waiting at the traffic light. The cars didn't move fast, I did my typical left-hand turn, was moving down about two blocks, when I was followed by a black and white car with a red siren buzzing. Being attentive to nuance, I sensed that it was a policeperson. This guy stopped me, and he came over, and I rolled down the window, being very affable; I didn't think I had done anything wrong. He said, "Hey, buddy, you pulled a jackrabbit back there." Now a number of thoughts went through my head, not being familiar with the term--I didn't know what he was talking about. I said,"Pardon me, Officer?" He says,"You pulled a jackrabbit left turn back there, Bucko!" Well, I'm always deferential in the face of loaded weapons, and I said, "Whatever you say, Sir!" And he said, "That's illegal in the state of California--your jackrabbit left turn is illegal!" And so I said, "Fine," I thought of bribing

him with the drumstick--that seemed too blatant--and he said, "That's going to cost you a ticket, buddy," and I took my ticket.

Okay...I paid that ticket at the local police station a week or so later--it cost me twelve dollars and fifty cents. That didn't seem to me a traumatizing fee, and as a consequence my life went along until about 2 months later I received my revised insurance premium... which had gone up four hundred and thirty-seven dollars as a consequence of that particular ticket. I had two speeding tickets in the previous three years, and that bumped my insurance up OVER four hundred dollars!

Now, society's expectations had been made manifest to me. No longer do I avoid making jackrabbit turns, I do not turn left at all. I find that if you go right three times, you can get anyplace in American and there's no reason to turn left.

I guess what I'm suggesting is that when you know what the expectations are you tend to cleave to them. And it's certainly true in the case of tests. Tests can influence the nature of what educators do. The problem, however, is that here again the message is garbled. We have tests which were created for a different purpose--to spread out examinees--as Dr. Elgin eloquently said, to sort individuals. We do not describe the test expectations in a fashion that will permit one to design on-target and relevant instruction.

You see, there's nothing wrong with teaching toward the competencies measured by a test. It's wrong to teach toward the particular items, but not to teach toward those skills, if they are truly praiseworthy skills.

A month or so ago I was in the state of Virginia, where they were choosing between a test which an organization that I head had produced and a test produced by another organization, to see whether they would use either as a statewide reading test for high school graduation requirements. Because of the choice between the two tests, I was conversant with the other test and I expected them to ask me something about that test. And they, in fact, did. They said, "Well, do you think this other test is an effective test, and if so, why? Or why not?"

Well, I thought it was an amazingly ineffective test, because it had 30 so-called instructional objectives which it measured. Each of the objectives ran as follows: "When presented with a display representing the TV Guide, the student will be able to answer multiple-choice questions based upon it." And so on. In each instance describing the visual stimulus, but in each instance not clarifying the nature of the test items that would be asked about it. This means that anything regarding the TV Guide is fair game, any conceivable kind of question regarding the income tax form is fair game...all we know is that it will be a multiple-choice question. That doesn't cut down the world at all. And as a consequence, what was going to happen in Virginia, had they accepted that test, was that any teacher trying to give the kids a fair shake would have taught everything possible about that particular thing--the TV Guide, the income tax form, and so on. Since you didn't know what the skill was, and you wanted to give your kids the best shake, you would teach and teach and teach and teach--and very quickly, minima would surely become maxima, because we would continue to emphasize those lower level skills, and drive out the higher level skills in the curriculum.

I am suggesting that when we do not know what the test measures, as is currently the case with most standardized achievement tests, we cannot design relevant instruction; we can't push toward what should be. When we do have a clear definition of what the test measures, then we can decide whether the definition ought to be pursued. To identify defensible kinds of competencies in the area of literacy is very important. As matters currently stand, the kinds of literacy tests available to us do not define well what they are measuring, and as a consequence we cannot tell whether they are good or bad tests.

In summary, I'd suggest that currently tests do not tell us very much about whether our kids can read or write or compute effectively; furthermore, they don't give us a very good handle on what those literacy skills ought to be, hence we can't design on-target instruction. I guess, in answer to the question "What can tests tell us?" I think tests should tell us about everything regarding student performance. Unfortunately, the way we're using them, they may just tell us nothing.

Dr. Rush: Thank you, Dr. Popham.

Our final speaker for this session is Dr. Philip Halfaker, Professor of Secondary Education here at San Diego State University. Professor Halfaker also has a unique position in the public policy domain, in that he is a member of the San Diego Unified School Board. He will speak on how public perceptions about literacy influence the making of public policy. Dr. Halfaker:

HOW DO PUBLIC IDEAS ABOUT LITERACY INFLUENCE THE MAKING OF PUBLIC POLICY?

(Dr. Philip Halfaker, Professor of Education - San Diego State University, and Member, Board of Education - San Diego City Schools)

Last, but I hope not least.

I'm going to talk for a few minutes about how public ideas about literacy influence the making of public policy. Some of the points that I'm going to make have been touched upon by our other speakers, but I think the context in which I'm going to use them will cast them in perhaps a little different light.

Whoever put this title together did an excellent job, for I feel that it is really the public's ideas, perceptions, and attitudes about literacy, or the quality of our schools, that eventually bring about change. And I'm not going to use the word "literacy" as it's been described by some of the other speakers; because I find that the public has an attitude about schools, about quality, and they're not really too concerned about literacy as Dr. Popham and I might see it, they're more interested in something more basic than that. So when I talk about quality, or the perceptions of the public, then you'll know that I'm talking about the perceptions of the schools overall.

I want to take a few minutes to illustrate how the public's perception of a school is directly related to the school's continued effectiveness.

In many inner cities of our country, the public has come to view those schools as substandard. As that attitude spreads, a tragic process begins. Concerned parents will pull their children out of those schools and place them in schools they perceive to be superior. If they are affluent, the children may go to a private or a parochial school. Other families may move to a suburb of the city, to a school they believe to be superior. And this process is not necessarily limited to inner city schools.

Last spring, for example, a group of parents in my district called and wanted to meet with me to discuss their school. In the mid 1960's, their school had been one of the largest elementary schools in San Diego. Parent participation was high, and the area was populated by young energetic families. However, the area has changed significantly during the last 10 to 12 years. The area matured; there are few families with young children. School enrollment has declined. And the once overcrowded, bustling elementary school is now enjoying the benefits of fewer students and a more stable educational program.

However, as I listened to the parents, they referred to some of our recently constructed schools, the good programs that those schools have, the parent involvement, and the things that the new schools have in the way of equipment and supplies that they perceive their school doesn't have. There was general agreement on the part of those parents that their school had gone downhill in terms of quality. These were their perceptions in spite of the fact that a majority of the teachers from the 60's still taught at that school. And there was no longer overcrowding--in fact, surplus classrooms were now available and provided space for a library and rooms for working in small groups.

I mentioned earlier that a tragic process begins when parents perceive their schools as "poor." I know, for example, that some of the parents from the school I just described are sending their children to other schools:some to private and parochial, some to other public schools. A few of the families have even moved out of that area. It is this loss of what some sociologists call "strivers" that slowly changes the character and eventually the educational program of the school.

Going back to the inner city schools--the exodus of middle and upper class whites and minorities from inner cities has left high concentrations of welfare families, resulting in dramatic changes in the make-up of the school populations. This is a socioeconomic phenomenon and it is not related to ethnic or racial groups. Yes, it is the children of the poor and the powerless who remain behind--the families whose children do not get nearly enough support and encouragement to maintain a high level of achievement in the classroom. Is it so surprising that test scores go down in some schools and up in others?

Yes, the public's ideas about literacy and the quality of their schools have a powerful impact on the continued effectiveness of those schools.

How does the public come to form these attitudes or ideas about literacy or schools? Studies show that public attitudes about education are formed by information gained from many sources. I am going to mention three of these.

Perhaps the principal one is in Mr. Jacoby's area--the newspapers. There has been a significant increase in the amount of space that newspapers have devoted to education during the last 10 years. Newspapers generally provide excellent coverage of a broad range of educational issues. Test scores, integration, public opinion polls, vandalism, school board meetings, truancy, and teacher strikes are some of the topics we see reported. The way these stories are headlined and written exerts a powerful influence on public opinion.

The second area having a great impact on the development of public attitudes is radio and television. Due to time constraints, radio and tv normally limit their reporting of education to capsulized highlights. The stories selected for coverage of necessity must be most newsworthy and often involve sensational events, such as integration, strikes, vandalism, etc. An exception to this was the recent three-hour special on education on one of the leading tv networks. Despite the in-depth look at United States education, however, several reviewers pointed out the fact that 2 of the 3 hours were spent on the problems in our schools, and only a single hour on exemplary programs and teaching.

The last area is word-of-mouth, which many surveyors now feel has been often overlooked, and is one of the most powerful molders of public opinion. This takes place in the contacts we have with friends, with neighbors, children, teachers, custodians, secretaries, bus drivers, and other school personnel. Because many of these individuals are assumed to have first-hand knowledge about the school or the issues, the impact on attitudes is powerful and lasting.

Now that we have reviewed how the public's ideas about education are formed, and how these ideas affect our schools, let's get down to the topic I was assigned to talk about, which is the impact of these attitudes on changes in public policy. I think you will be surprised at the number of educational policy changes which have been made in response to public attitudes.

Two changes which have been proposed at the national level are now before Congress: (1) the Packwood-Moynihan Bill, and (2) the Department of Education Bill. I've got to get a lick in at Packwood and Moynihan, because I don't feel comfortable at all with that piece of legislation. The Packwood-Moynihan Bill is better known as the "Tuition Tax Credit" bill. The original bill provided tax credit for tuition paid by parents of college, secondary, or elementary students. The House has amended out tax credits for elementary and secondary students; it appears, though, that tuition tax credits for college students will pass both the House and Senate. (Don't get too excited, those of you who are still in school, because President Carter has repeatedly said that he will veto it if it passes. And even if he does not veto it, it doesn't apply to those of us in the state university system, as most things seem not to apply--because we pay <u>fees</u> and not tuition.)

The fight to keep tax credits in the bill for elementary and secondary school students was a very bitter fight and represented a lobbying effort by thousands of parents whose ideas about the education their children are getting in the public schools are slightly more than negative. I strongly oppose the bill and will be glad to discuss it with any of you who are interested.

The second piece of national legislation would create a new national department, the Department of Education. The current Department

of Health, Education and Welfare would be broken up and two cabinet level departments created. The president is supporting this measure, which has strong support from the education community and teacher groups. I cannot say that the average person on the street is aware of this piece of legislation at all. Again, a large segment has the idea that education and schools will be better served if education has department status.

We have also seen at the national level an increasing concern over the decline in College Board, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Test (ACT), and other achievement test scores. This concern has resulted in a number of studies to determine reasons for the decline. The studies conducted by the Carnegie and Kettering Foundations, the Educational Testing Service, and other groups are providing policymakers and the public with recommendations for change. Most of the changes that have taken place have been at the state and local levels.

California has been one of the most responsive of the states to the public's concern about education. In the early 70's, the Ryan Credential Law increased subject matter requirements for teachers. It also included a mandate that all students preparing to be secondary teachers complete a course in secondary school reading problems. It was, in part, the public's attitude that teachers needed to be better prepared in their teaching majors and that all teachers needed to know how to help students with reading problems, that caused the drafting and the passage and the signing of the Ryan Bill.

In the mid-70's, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Wilson Riles appointed a Commission composed of parents, students, teachers and local school board members to study and make recommendations for the Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education. The RISE Commission, as it was called, was created as a result of the concern California citizens were voicing about the quality and programs of our intermediate and secondary schools. Many recommendations of the RISE Commission have been implemented by school districts throughout the state, and some of the recommendations have been written into state law in AB65, the School Reform Act.

One of the most significant changes which has taken place is the establishment of competency standards for high school graduation. Well over half of the states in our country have established standards in reading, writing and computation which a student must attain in order to qualify for a high school diploma. This movement is in direct response to the public's concern about the literacy levels attained by high school students.

Assemblyman Hart authored the first competency bill in 1976. Assembly Bill 65, the School Reform Act of 1977, modified the Hart Bill by requiring assessment of competencies at the elementary level. Students in California must now be assessed at the elementary, junior high and senior levels to determine if competency standards are being met. If the student does not meet the required standards at any one of these levels, a conference with the parent is mandatory to plan a remedial program. The graduating class of 1980 will be the first class to graduate under the competency law.

At the local level--which means the 1,043 school districts of California--there is even more evidence of responsiveness to public concern about the quality of education. I'll just run through these items briefly.

1. Fundamental Schools. The emergence of what are being called Fundamental Schools during the past 5 years is an indication of the public's desire for a more structured and formal educational program. These schools normally emphasize the basics, usually have strict disciplinary codes, and many even have dress codes.

2. Self-Contained Classrooms. A combination of the "Open Classroom" philosophy and "loft-schools" has resulted in new schools being built to permit this type of organization. As more parents insist on self-contained classrooms for their children, districts are responding by providing individual classrooms to offer more programs of this type.

3. In-Service Education Programs. A look at almost any school district's and university's offerings of in-service courses for teachers reveals a heavy emphasis on the teaching of basic skills--reading, writing and arithmetic.

4. Reading Teachers. As public awareness of the reading problem has grown, new credential programs have been developed to train teachers as reading specialists. Almost every school has one or more reading specialists, depending upon the level of achievement at that school.

5. A General Emphasis on Reading. Almost all schools now have reading laboratories, most of them well stocked with materials and equipment, to assist students either in speed or developmental reading. Programs like San Diego's, of reading in every classroom, have emphasized that every teacher needs to be cognizant of the reading problem to help identify in their classes students who do have reading problems, and to either help them or refer them to teachers who can provide reading help. There is the Right to Read Program, which I think is an outstanding program--we have it at Wilson Junior High--which is a demonstration project to concentrate on the improvement of basic reading skills in junior high youngsters. Another is Project Write, with which some of you in the audience are familiar. It's being done in cooperation with UCSD, is called the San Diego Writing Project, and is also in operation in other cities. This is the program for whom Mary Barr, in the front row here, whom many of you know, is one of the directors; and if any of you are interested in the program I would encourage you to visit with Mary, because it is an attempt to work directly on the writing skills of our high school students.

Also, one thing that I know we've all noticed in the ads in the papers and the literature that comes to our homes, has been the rapid growth of the private sector's Evelyn-Woods-type programs. There are any number of clinics now, offering diagnostic, speed, development, almost any kind of reading help that the child may need; and again, I think that this is a reflection of the interest and concern regarding basic skills.

One other point that many of you may have missed, and that's the California State Proficiency Exam. A few years ago legislation was passed to permit students to test out of high school. The student

has to be at least a junior, and it's a competency-type examination; that is, if a student achieves a certain level on the various sections he or she may be permitted to opt out of high school and get a certificate, and I think most of the colleges and universities are accepting those students for enrollment.

Another thing that I see are school board members and even legislators, when they're up for election, for races we have around the county and the state--one of their leading issues will be the back-to-basics movement. Now how elected officials follow through on that, and how they will solve the issues involving this complex problem, most don't bother to say. But I am pointing out that this is what the public apparently wants to hear, and this is what they get.

A final thought... Our teachers in our schools have been called upon by our society to do so many things... A beginning teacher evaluation study conducted by the Far West Regional Labs identified that one of the factors closely related to student achievement in the basics is the amount of time spent on the task. That is, if you're going to learn to read, the best way to do that apparently from this study is to have time on that task with the teacher, reading. And with that, I will just say that I am pleased to be here today, and I feel a little bit uneasy because I have a foot in each camp, but I do get out and visit with the public and try to respond to their concerns, and I hope I can share some of those with you today.

Thank you.

Dr. Rush: Thank you, Dr. Halfaker.

Our first respondent is Dr. Barbara Swyhart, who is Associate Professor of Religious Studies. Dr. Swyhart is conversant with the issue of ethics (specifically medical ethics) and she will respond to the comments of our panelists. Dr. Swyhart:

FIRST RESPONDENT:

Good morning.

I am in the precarious position of being first to respond, in an area which demands, certainly, the kind of expertise of professional scholars and practitioners in both secondary and elementary education. Deviating slightly from the instructions of Dr. Rush, I would like to respond this morning from where I stand as an educator: a teacher in a university, and a past teacher of both elementary and secondary education.

First, I would like to pose a philosophical question touched upon by Mr. Jacoby, and certainly stated by Dr. Elgin, but which needs to be addressed directly. And that is, that we have an unrecognized mismatch--to use Dr. Popham's expression--a <u>paradox</u> that we are confronted with as educators. And that paradox concerns what we, perhaps in our

everyday life, and in our public life certainly, acknowledge as cultural pluralism, which is slighted by a singleness of mind in the standards of education.

I find that philosophical discrepancy between these two descriptions of what is the ideal situation for students and certainly for ourselves and our society to be a key philosophical issue on the question of literacy. That is, can we live with cultural pluralism on the one hand, and on the other expect that,given our sociological framework, we can demand the same kind of expertise, the same kind of keenness, on the part of all students?

I think that a response to this paradox might be that we live in the paradox or duality of self-responsibility. Our public responsibility and our personal responsibility seem to be very divided and we live in the healthy tension between the two. Part of the problem of the literacy crisis, too, is in the way in which we respond to that philosophical question.

The second issue touched upon, but not really raised at all--and that is the issue of the teacher. It seems to me that if the focus is on the testing, and the test scores, and the use of the test scores, I think we are side-stepping the complicated and certainly the more poignant issue, and that is the question of the teacher's motivation, the teacher's sense of worth in the teaching enterprise. I think perhaps today the question of who is the teacher in terms of the professional vis a vis the practitioner is the one that needs to be wrestled with, and certainly one that we, as educators, need to re-examine. Who are we? What image do we portray, and are we happy with that image? If we're not happy, how do we intend or want to try to change that image?

I also want to raise a question that it seems to me is perhaps also pivotal in our discussion. Dr. Elgin made reference to the item of circling the bunny that is different from all the other bunnies. I'd like to say that that is a very important task and skill. If you cannot do that, then you cannot do very much, in terms of the kind of work that is demanded in the academic arena. I suppose that I'm giving away a bias; and my bias is that it seems to me--and I have taught in elementary and secondary school, and I have taught in underprivileged areas as well as in more affluent areas--the desire to learn is present in all students. I think that perhaps the issue is not whether or not the individual can make the distinction among the bunnies, but rather how the individual is taught to do that, and what image of self is conveyed to the student as that process is being taught.

And I cite a perhaps very trite example, but a very real one. There is a tremendous difference in children's programming on television between Sesame Street and something like Mr. Rogers Neighborhood--and I don't know if you're familiar with the two programs, but some time, if you have a chance, watch the two of them. One of them (the Sesame Street program) gives the content and the information, but relies upon quick recall and uses audiovisual aids to the nth degree, to such an extent that a teacher would feel incompetent in that setting. In the Mr. Rogers program, however, learning does take place, but there is a concentration, a dialogue, established between the child and Mr. Rogers. This kind of illustration points to the problem: yes, we are dealing with different kinds of children from different

backgrounds, but it is perhaps in the understanding of who the teacher is in the communication process--and what exactly is taking place in that communication process--that we might get to the basics which relate ultimately to test scores and test results.

Thank you.

Dr. Rush: Our second respondent is Dr. Jessie Flemion, Professor of History. Dr. Flemion's area of expertise is 17th century political history. Dr. Flemion:

SECOND RESPONDENT:

I suppose it's not surprising that as an historian, as I listened to the four original panelists, the things which tended to stick in my mind and which I tended to pick up on were things which had some historical base. And as I listened, I came out of that experience with a question which I think--I hope--we will address in the coming afternoon. The question is: is there some difference between schooling and education? And along with that, is the narrow literacy crisis as it was defined today--the reading/writing/computation crisis--an issue involved with schooling?

What has been the traditional historical purpose of general public education in the United States? (By general public education I mean the K-12 system.) I believe that there is a good amount of evidence to suggest that the function, the purpose of general education in America, has been the acquisition of skills for success in the marketplace; it has been to create an economically viable citizen. I think that that is true, whether we were an agricultural and farming nation, or whether we are what we have become in the last century, an industrial/urban nation.

I think that is not of course the only purpose; the purpose of good citizenship in a democratic society was one of great importance, at least in the founding of public education in America. But nonetheless I believe we should recognize the degree to which schooling has been supported--universal schooling in the society--for economic purposes.

I also think that the broader literacy question or crisis--where can we find the educated person in our society today?--is also a product of our history, the product of a society which until very recently could expect that only a very small elite in the society would acquire learning beyond the general education level, beyond the high school level. I think we must address those questions, we must address whether in fact we want or can alter the nation's perception of the primary function of education as something that produces persons useful--in the economic sense--to the society. It comes down to other questions which are involved in issues raised by Dr. Elgin and Dr. Popham: for example, the question of what personal literacy is for? If it is primarily for internal self-development, then the questions of economic relevance become irrelevant. But if it is something more, then it seems to me that we are going to have to address these questions.

Certainly Dr. Elgin was correct in suggesting the way in which tests have been abused, and the way in which achievement has been correlated to intelligence rather than to other kinds of factors. Yet at the same time, I don't agree that literacy tests (if we can ever define what they are) should be testing virtue. Not that virtue is unimportant in a society; it just seems to me that we need other tests, need other means, with which to guarantee that we recognize the compassion, the virtue, and so forth of persons, along with other kinds of desirable attitudes and skills which we want them to acquire.

I was very much struck when Dr. Popham discussed the inception of testing in the United States--standardized testing in the United States--during World War I; because one of the things which I thought about, in this historical perspective of the literacy question, was the way in which, at the very moment of time which he was talking about (approximately the World War I period), the United States as a society was grappling with an experience which it had never known before. It had just gone through a short time period, a decade and a half, in which some 18 million foreign-born immigrants had come to the United States, most of them speaking no English of any kind. And we can see in the first 2 decades of the century, from many, many different directions, the coming of a serious question as to what we would do in order to preserve a culture in which everyone would be able to communicate at some level with everyone else. I think perhaps these two things are not unrelated at all; that there was a growing desire on the part of the majority culture--which was a white middle-class culture--that everyone should conform, more than ever before in American history, to some rather narrow and well-defined standards. And I think it's perhaps probable that the immigrants who came were prepared to accept that notion, that they too wanted to meet those standards of white middle-class society. Obviously, it's difficult to know what any individual immigrant thought about the treatment he received when he was not able to meet those standards; but nonetheless, I have a feeling that perhaps there was more agreement that a single standard was appropriate than is true today. And of course that raises the same question that was raised by Dr. Swyhart, the issue of cultural pluralism, the fact that we have groups in the society today who do not accept the idea that there ought to be any kind of single standard and do not want to move to that. And so we must deal with this question of pluralism, and the question of whether in fact to be a successful person in the American marketplace will not require a closer adherence to one single generalized standard.

In conclusion, let me say that I pernaps am most interested in the public policy side of these issues. I agree, I think, with everything that Dr. Halfaker has told us about the way in which the public can rather forcefully and quickly have an impact upon public education policies. But I think we must, as some point today, deal with the question of whether all of this activity which he has indicated to us--in the form of legislation, tuition tax credits, a Department of Education, the Ryan Act, competency-based education, all these kinds of activities which represent the response to the public--are in fact likely to meet the problem.

Thank you.

Dr. Rush: Our third respondent this morning is Ms. Charlotte Tenney, who is presently a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics at San Diego State University and is president of the Linguistics Students Association. Ms. Tenney:

THIRD RESPONDENT:

I'm feeling just a little bit as if I'm taking one of those GRE tests and I've been given 15 minutes to come up with something intelligent to say. Fortunately, it's on a better topic than I'm usually given on such tests.

I'd like to respond to each one of the areas that have been discussed by our speakers today.

As far as the first one--is the crisis affecting the professions?--is concerned, I think the professions are affecting the crisis. I think they are creating a crisis, in that the professions are becoming more demanding in the things that they are asking people to do in the way of reading, in the way of competency in the skill of writing. In that sense, they are creating a crisis of their own. They need more from us than we have in the past been required to give them. This is due also to the media, and to the fact that we have so much more mechanization. People are required to write and read more, and to digest more information, than they ever have been in the past. As far as the effect of the crisis on the professions, I feel it is only that the professions must deal with the fact that they are creating a need which they are somehow going to have to find a way to fill.

Is the crisis real? Well, my own feeling about reality is that it's a matter of perception. If you perceive it to be real, it is real for you; and if a large mass of people perceive something to be real that is reality and it must be dealt with. So if the large mass of our population believes that there is a literacy crisis, yes, we have one. Now we can change that, by changing our perceptions of the situation. But how we are going to change our perceptions is another matter, and that would have to do with such things as public opinion and public ideas. How are we going to deal with what the public feels about the reading ability of their children and of their contemporaries? That would be a matter of testing as well. We bombard them with information that all of our students are failing the tests. And as we heard today, the tests may not even test reading. They're a beautiful device for sorting out the common people from the chosen few, but they may not test literacy at all. What we're telling people, therefore, is "we can't read because we don't pass the tests"--now, that is affecting our perception, and thereby changing our reality. The result is that through our media and our testing policies we are creating a crisis of our own, one that has serious effects upon public policy and upon all of us.

Thank you.

Dr. Rush: Before I introduce our last respondent, I want to make one note, and that is that after Dr. Schaber concludes his remarks we hope that you will join in discussing the issue with all of us. The respondents and the panelists will exchange views over the issues raised, and we hope that you will feel free to comment, to challenge, to respond, to philosophize if that's your bent, either on this morning's questions or others that you feel may have been overlooked in the discussion thus far.

Now, Dr. Steven Schaber is our last,but undoubtedly not our least, respondent. Dr. Schaber wears two hats here at the university; he is in the Department of Germanic & Slavic Languages and Literature, and also holds an appointment in the Department of Classical & Oriental Languages. Dr. Schaber:

FOURTH RESPONDENT:

We've talked for several hours now, with immense literacy, about the problem of literacy, and not, I daresay--having observed the language behavior of the participants and my own as well--without making a number of grammatical errors apiece. As Dr. Elgin points out, none of us really speaks Standard Academic English. We write it, more or less well; occasionally editors quibble with us even over that. We haven't had to face the problem of lie/lay/laid/lain yet, so far as I can recall.

The discussion, however, beyond the level of grammar, has implied on the part of us all the capacity to approach a problem, understand it, analyze it, and deal with it critically--either from the point of view of talking about it up here or of receiving down in the audience. And we've been doing this using the medium of language. Language is ultimately nothing more than a tool, for expressing and organizing your thoughts. And this to me is the ultimate question, the ultimate humanistic question, if you will.

Dr. Popham defined very well the limits of testing; and I have no doubt that there are many limitations to tests as they're now designed. But I don't think we can approach the admitted failure of tests to measure perfectly what they ought to set out to measure with the response of throwing out the concept of standards altogether.

Literacy is vitally important in our world, and it takes many forms. I, for example, will readily confess virtual illiteracy in the areas of science, at its outer levels today. I have a problem dealing with the world in scientific terms; I'm a humanist, and that in fact is a limitation. And it is crucial. I am perfectly aware of my incapacity because of this lack of ability to understand, really understand, scientific questions.

When I go to vote, for example, about the question of atomic reactors... how safe are they? Can I deal with these kinds of questions? Democracy demands, it implies, an immense responsibility; it makes immense demands upon the population. Proposition 13, I think, in some senses may have passed because people, although literate enough to read the

ballot issue, were not literate enough to go into the more subtle problems, the possible results and so forth, and voted more or less off the top of their heads.

We're faced with two ballot issues--Propositions 5 and 6--coming up now in the fall, both of which have surface appeal to a lot of people, and both of which have immense implications which have to be gone into if one is going to vote intelligently.

The remark was made about the professions making more demands upon us, in themselves creating a literacy crisis; that's true, too. It's not their fault--it's the fault of our modern world, and the fault of the way our society is organized.

English is, then, a tool for dealing with the world, and for enabling us to deal with the world in ever-larger terms. And likewise, for making it possible to discuss things in common language and in an integrated way.

Dr. Elgin referred to her own Ozark background, coming from a non-standard brand of English. Of my grandparents, only one was a native speaker of English; there were a Dane, a Swede, and a German back there. We have successfully managed, by acquiring skills, to liberate ourselves from that limitation, the limitation of a foreign-speaking immigrant, or an Ozark mountain person. I daresay there are people back in the Ozarks, or people--perhaps on the farm in Demark where my grandfather came from--who would love to have our skills...love to have our jobs, no doubt...which involves not just a mastery of style, not just a matter of lie/lay/lain, as I see it; but rather a capacity to deal with society, and to deal with professional activities at a higher level than those simply of whatever ghetto we happen to have been born into.

And the public concern, spoken to so eloquently at the end by Dr. Halfaker, indicates a very good awareness of this. There is a desire on the part of the public. They perceive a need for a Back-to-the-Basics. Education, after all--as a classicist I can't resist pointing it out--means to lead out, to free someone from where they are, to lead them forth to somewhere else, to lead out of the status quo, to let them escape, in fact, from that limitation. And parents perceive this; they want for their children something more than they have already. They're not old mossbacks when they ask for discipline in the schools and formal education, and they want their children to have the tools that will enable them to enter what we call "the elite."

I think perhaps the truest elitism is the view that the skills we take for granted in ourselves are not vital for others; because that condemns them to staying right where they are. Rather, the answer to the literacy question, I think, and the great problem involved, is: how do we establish, how do we share, these skills, and make it possible for everyone in our society to have the tools to integrate themselves into the larger framework of society? Not to become all Big Macs, a sort of homogenized hamburger, but to enter the mainstream--so that they too can have the leisure to come to conferences like this instead of doing a hard day's work.

Dr. Rush: What can I say? Thank you, Dr. Schaber, and my thanks again to all our panelists and respondents. Now, we invite questions and remarks from our audience.

PLENARY REMARKS (TEN HARD QUESTIONS):

(Dr. Suzette Elgin)

One of the items contained in your packet of materials for this symposium is titled "The Issues: Ten Hard Questions." I can think of no more appropriate way to bring the day's activities to a close than by looking at those questions and reviewing what light--if any--we have managed to shed on them today.

(1) How is literacy defined?

You have heard a number of definitions of literacy during the morning session and this afternoon's workshops. Their range and variety is as astonishing as their lack of specificity, and they appear to break down into the following categories: (a) literacy is being able to pass a particular literacy test or tests; (b) literacy is mastery of the speech mode of the educated person; (c) literacy is the ability to read and write "good" English. The first definition is not only circular but has an infinite number of possible resolutions--one for each test that now exists or may exist in the future. The second and third are non-definitions, since they rest upon the premise that there exist meaningful definitions of the terms "educated person" and "good English," and the premise itself is manifestly false. The only coherent answer to the question "How is literacy defined?" is that, at the present time, it isn't.

(2) How is the medium of literacy (Standard Written English) defined?

It is not surprising, given our lack of success at defining literacy itself, that we have made little progress toward defining the medium by which it is measured and expressed. There is nothing representing a national consensus on the defining characteristics of Standard Written English; even less is there a consensus on that more esoteric variety--Standard Written Academic English--which I prefer to call "Academic Regalian." Proposed definitions either rely upon the undefined "speech of the educated person" already mentioned above; or they consist entirely of statements as to what the Standard is not and what examples of the Standard will not contain; or they fall back on the weakest of all possible non-definitions: the claim that "everybody knows" what Standard Written English is and there is therefore no need to define it. It is ironic, in the face of this amorphousness, that we continue to feel confident testing people for their mastery of we know not what and issuing statistics reporting our achievements in that activity.

(3) How is literacy measured?

Most of our discussion today of the evaluation measures for literacy has centered about the standardized objective tests. We have discussed the norm-referenced test, in which a given individual's score is arrived at with relation to some group of other individuals who served as the original population for establishing score distributions. I am happy to say that I think this particular process has been clarified

for us greatly by Dr. Popham and by others among you. The potential for abuse of the norm-referenced test, and in particular the potential for misunderstanding of its results, has been commented on in detail.

The criterion-referenced test has also been discussed, and it has been made clear that although it is likely to be a far better instrument for testing literacy than the norm-referenced instrument, it must still be prepared, administered and analyzed with great care. As was pointed out by Dr. Popham, a criterion-referenced test is only as good as its questions.

We did not have an opportunity to take up the other two measures on your handout: "holistic" testing, and subjective judgments. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on these after the fact, and I will therefore simply direct you to the sources in the Bibliography and Resource List in your packet for further information.

We do appear to be in agreement that, whatever the instrument used for literacy measurement, it is not being adequately done and changes need to be made with all possible dispatch.

(4) What are the effects of the alleged literacy crisis on public policy? What steps are being taken in response to the claim that there is a crisis?

At every level--local, state, and national--the primary public policy effect of the public perception that there is a literacy crisis has been legislation. Governing and legislating bodies have rushed to respond to public outcry with a variety of measures having major consequences for school curricula, for teacher certification, for both exit and entry criteria to the academic and professional worlds, and for the personal lives of every one of us. These measures were described for us in detail by Dr. Halfaker, and I am sure that all of you are aware of many other examples. We are faced with a proliferation of task forces, investigatory commissions, committees, study panels, and even a proposed new department of the Cabinet. It remains to be seen whether we shall yet repent at leisure what has been done with such astonishing haste in an atmosphere of panic.

(5) What are the effects of the alleged literacy crisis on people's lives?

For the student who does not do well on the tests, the real-life effects are obvious. Such students take remedial courses, drop out of school, fail to get jobs or scholarships, and suffer the penalties attendant upon being perceived, and labelled, as second-rate. The student who does well does not escape, either, although the effects upon his or her life are somewhat different. Each new test, each new requirement, adds another source of tension and another expenditure of time, energy, and--usually--money, to an already heavy load. Furthermore, the "literate" student pays an indirect penalty caused by the crisis atmosphere within which he must do his work; teachers who are nervous about accountability cannot carry out their work at peak efficiency.

For the teacher, there is the constant feeling that he or she is being used as a scapegoat, is being asked to be all things to all students--

is being asked to do more and more with less and less and blamed when even the most unrealistic expectations cannot be met. Perhaps worst of all, the teacher no longer has any self-perception as one who is respected and looked up to by either the students or the general public. The literacy crisis has robbed our educators of even that "psychic" fringe benefit.

The administrator can do little but wonder where to apply pressure next, since he or she is caught between the demands from above that he guarantee that the teachers produce, and the demands from below for a guarantee that the teachers will be protected from unreasonable requirements.

The parent suffers from the feeling that the money being spent on the education of his or her children is money wasted, that the child will finish school improperly equipped for adult life, and that there is nothing available as a means of relief from this situation. Furthermore, the parent must listen to the claims of many educators and social scientists that the blame for the "literacy crisis" lies not with the schools but with the home, and that if parents would only do their part there would be no crisis.

Policymakers suffer from the imperative need to do something. Attacked on every side and at every level, their burden is a heavy one, so heavy that there is not really time for them to consider whether the "something" done is a finger in the dike or a tunnel through it.

Finally, every citizen is personally affected by all this, because every citizen must pay a portion of the taxes which support this system that is alleged to be failing. This is as true of the individual without chick or child as it is of the parent of eight; and the childless citizen does not have even the comfort of tax deductions to offset the pain.

(6) How are the media involved with these issues? What part do they play?

The media are our major source of information, and as such, must bear a significant responsibility for the climate of public opinion. When a mass medium calls a 5-point drop a "plunge" in scores, that is a deliberate choice from among many other nouns that might have been used. It may be a choice that sells more papers or magazines, or holds more viewers to the set, but it is a choice that ought to be seriously considered. Selling public perceptions should be done with at least as much consideration and as much ethical forethought as selling a detergent or a dog food.

(7) Is the Crisis--academic, professional, and/or functional--real?

On this point we have agreed to disagree. You have heard me say that I do not think so, not for a moment. You have heard Mr. Jacoby, and others, say that they most emphatically do think it is real. You have heard Dr. Popham say that he agrees neither with me nor with Mr. Jacoby; and Dr. Halfaker also has taken a middle stance. What should be clear is that, as Charlotte Tenney pointed out, so long as the American public is convinced that the Crisis exists, the results are roughly

the same as if it really were. That is, the effect of the Crisis as a group perception is essentially independent of its reality.

(8) If it is real, what can and should be done about it?

If I knew the answer to that question, I would not be standing here speaking to you today; I would be somewhere contemplating my laurels. If any one of us had heard the answer to that question during the course of this symposium, we would not be be "sitting here idle," as Dr. Schaber would put it--we would be celebrating our new and wonderful knowledge.

(9) If it isn't real, how can the myth(s) be laid to rest?

I think the answer to this question was offered again and again, by almost everyone that participated here today. If the Great Literacy Crisis is a myth, it can only be exposed by the wide dissemination to all segments of the public of information that is both clear and convincing. An article or two in a scholarly magazine will not do it. An academic symposium, although it is a start, will not do it. The misinformation about literacy standards and testing--if misinformation there be--must be corrected in the popular press, and in the PTA meeting, and on the street corner. Here the scholars must share the responsibility of the media. If they cannot bring themselves to make their information clear and to state it in such a way that it can be understood without first obtaining a doctoral degree, then they have no right to accuse the media of distortion and selective exaggeration. It is the scholars and educators who provide the media with their information; if it is no more than platitudes and jargon, they would be better advised to hold their peace.

The California Council for the Humanities in Public Policy is to be commended for its attempts to take practical steps to bring information out of the ivory towers and down to the grassroots; that is the only useful and practical course, and it must begin somewhere.

(10) What can or should be the role of the humanists in all this?

As you are aware, I am not a humanist. If the humanist/scientist dichotomy is real,and not also simply a myth of public perception, I can only pledge my allegiance in the scientific camp. However, from listening to the humanists speak to us today, I have learned a great deal--perhaps enough to state their role at least tentatively.

A humanist can, from the point of view of his or her particular discipline, consider an issue in a dimension that may not be apparent except from that discipline. The fragmentation and specialization of knowledge today is so burdensome that we are for the most part locked into a classic Forest-and-Trees Syndrome. Each humanist can, and certainly should, offer us a way to step outside the forest for a moment and get a clear look at it, well away from the obscuring vegetation. Further, when humanists come together from different disciplines and present their fresh perspectives, they should also be able to point out to the rest of us relationships among those perspectives that we might well have overlooked. In the analysis of any problem, these

two steps surely constitute an invaluable contribution, and one that policymakers must take greater advantage of.

I have not answered all ten of our hard questions. I doubt that we did much more today than make those ten hard questions more precise, and more well-formed. As a linguist, however, I can assure you of one thing, one fact that you can rely upon absolutely: when the questions have been made well-formed, the most difficult part of solving the problem is behind you.

Thank you, and thank you again for coming.

(END OF SYMPOSIUM)

PAPERS BY PROJECT INTERN

(The two papers below were written by Ms. Marina Leslie, student intern for the project from the University of California Santa Cruz. Ms. Leslie's assistance in the preparation of the symposium and the materials was invaluable; we are pleased to be able to include her remarks in this volume. The first paper was written prior to the conference; the second represents her views after attending the session and participating throughout the activities of the day.)

PRE-CONFERENCE PAPER:

When one addresses the possibility of a literacy crisis, it becomes immediately apparent that the issue is a complex and very often an emotional one. So fundamental is the ability to use one's native tongue that there is scarcely an aspect of our lives that it does not affect. For this reason, its acquisition is many-faceted and its measurement is a tricky business at best.

When measuring the mastery of English, the question must immediately be raised: "What English?" This word is loosely used to describe a language, a profession, a skill, an art, a discipline, a personal act, a social act, an intellectual act, a cultural act. A. Douglass Alley, supposedly having the homonym "intercourse" in mind, compares it to the sexual act, saying that instinct gets us through although some things should be learned.

If the mastery of "standard" English is the criterion for literacy, further clarification is still necessary. What is meant by "standard" English? The various definitions of this term give some idea of its varied functions: i.e., "edited" English; "prestige" English; "educated" English, etc. No two definitions of these terms are exactly alike; however, they are all regarded as "the most socially acceptable dialect."

Although literacy would seem at first to be the unqualified goal of our society for its members, this is not entirely the case. There is a tension between the desire for a literate society--one whose members can communicate, function and contribute satisfactorily in a social context--and the desire to maintain linguistic "standards." One impulse is essentially democratic, the other essentially elitist. The one implies that all people should speak and write acceptable English; the other that only one standard is acceptable and that it is the one peculiar to the educated and upper classes which it is designed to distinguish. The conflict between these two values, inherent in broadly disseminating the "standard" dialect, is often overlooked. Those who lament the decline of the language are theoretically those who desire a more literate populace; but as I have indicated, the linguistic watchdogs and guardians of shibboleths might be more distressed if everyone <u>did</u> master the socially preferred dialect.

There is, however, slight chance of this occurring. The standard simply does not take account of regional and cultural variations. It

is by definition a created model imposed on an organic and changing language. Its distinguishing features, those stressed by texts and teachers, are generally those that run counter to actual usage. This is not to say that a standard is not a necessary and useful tool for achieving some sort of uniformity in writing; it is. It is not, however, a measure of intelligence, industry, or morality--all of which have somehow become attached to its mastery.

The flip side of the conflict of values concerning literacy is found in the anti-academic, anti-intellectual climate in American today. Americans value education, but only to a point. Education is okay because it will get you a job. But as everyone knows, the job more often than not has little to do with the academic world or what you have learned there. The teacher is your model...but teachers are generally underpaid--that is, if they are employed at all. Students are expected to increase their vocabulary with words they wouldn't dream of using with their peers for fear of sounding affected. School is a place where you are sequestered until you are released to the "real" world. If there is a literacy crisis I believe it is more the legitimacy of literacy than the mastery of "basic skills" that is lacking.

Measuring the mastery of "standard" English is the other problematic area. Various tests have been devised, but there is no agreement as to what is to be measured or how. There are proficiency tests, competency tests, criterion-referenced tests, achievement tests, and many other varieties of tests; they test for literacy, knowledge, aptitude (or, as their critics charge, for such things as social class, test-taking abilities, teachers' performance, the effectiveness of a given school, and the like.) Confusion mounts when a test--which may or may not give reliable measurements--of English (whose boundaries are undefined) shows a drop in scores over the last few years. What does it mean? Who is to blame? There is no consensus. Among the culprits suggested are schools, teachers, test-takers, rampant permissiveness, Watergate, television, the baby boom, the disintegration of the family, desegregation, drugs, and the lack of money going toward education. To some, this drop in scores means that basic skills are being neglected and should be resurrected in the curriculum. However, if figures such as those cited by Christopher Jenks in his article, "What's Behind the Drop in SAT Scores" (Working Papers, July/August 1978) are correct, and 17-year-olds actually did better on "basic literacy" tests in 1974 than in 1971, and are doing worse only in the "complex skills," then a return to the basics would not only be unnecessary but potentially damaging as well. The causes of a decline in critical thinking and synthesis of ideas are unclear. There is no evidence that IQ test scores have declined; in fact, any evidence indicates the reverse.

In my research for this project, I found considerably more finger-pointing than comprehensive evaluations of the significance of the drop in test scores. No one, of any camp, seems to know exactly what to make of the situation. Much of the conflict revolves around what the ultimate goals of education are and who is accountable for their achievement. What teachers, students, parents and taxpayers want from schools often differs greatly. These goals need to be developed and discussed more broadly and fully before anyone can be held accountable for seeing them realized. If the energy invested in finding scapegoats were redirected to finding acceptable and workable ways of teaching and measuring literacy, everyone's interests would be better served.

POST-CONFERENCE PAPER:

I believe the reality of existence of a literacy crisis was very concisely dealt with by Charlotte Tenney. Her comment that if such a crisis is perceived as existing, then it indeed exists, seems to me a penetrating analysis of the situation. It also indicates how the "crisis" must be dealt with. Discrediting test scores in academic circles will not change the public's perception of a crisis. If the majority of people believe that there is a literacy crisis, they are led to do so by articles in popular magazines, of the Why-Johnny-Can't-Write variety, and by the popular philosophy (which is anything but new) that everything is going to the dogs and education is no exception. I believe that Mr. Jacoby was representative of the media in general when he hedged the issue of the media's responsibility to offer a more balance presentation of the issue, particularly with regard to the reliability of the test scores.

There is a pressing need for English teachers, linguists, and other professionals whose business is literacy and language to make themselves heard in other than scholarly publications. Whatever the "reality" of deceptive test scores, the crisis will exist until the public is made cognizant of the scores' shortcomings. Unfortunately, the public may desire a more cut-and-dried analysis of the situation than is possible, given its complexity; hence Mr. Jacoby's refrain: "I don't care about tests; I just want to know whether or not there's a crisis." It is, therefore, the responsibility of those who have some familiarity with the complexities and mechanisms of literacy assessment to come forward with some comprehensive and widely disseminated articles. I was glad to see that the symposium was being televised. It is crucial that the issues dealt with in the symposium reach more than a select group of teacher and administrators. As stated in the project brochure, all taxpayers, students and parents as well as teachers and administrators, are affected by--and conversely have an effect on--the situation. If there <u>isn't</u> a crisis, somebody should be let in on it!

One thing that struck me as ironic was the fact that the only participants in the symposium were those who would be regarded by any criterion as highly literate--those whose professions were defined by their mastery of the language and their ability to teach, write, or speak "educated" English. By present testing procedures, as indicated in the selected statistics in our materials packets, numerous test-takers are being classified as "illiterate." But although we benignly suggested that they were probably <u>mis</u>-classified, they were not invited to attend. I would have been especially interested to hear from the academic, professional, or functional "illiterates" who were nevertheless "functioning," or those in professional or academic positions (of whom I suspect there are ample representatives.)

The area covered in the symposium that was most enlightening for me was the discussion of testing itself. The present use of tests seems so incontrovertibly misdirected, unrepresentative, and damaging, that it is scarcely surprising that no defenders of tests came forward. There did, however, seem to be a general consensus that some form of assessment was necessary, and some reason to believe that testing methods are improving.

One area that I felt was somewhat underplayed (although time was an obvious limiting factor) was the problem of accountability. The public is constantly bombarded with the media's reports of the failure of teachers and the educational system. Like the notion of the reality of the "crisis," if people perceive that teachers are accountable for teaching literacy and are failing in their duty, the charge must be adequately answered or dismissed; and not only within such publications as English Journal or College English, which only reach a professional audience. I realize that this may sound inconsistent with my first paper, which called for less finger-pointing. I am now coming to believe that if the reality of the situation is indeed a function of perception, then the teaching profession--and no less, the test-makers--need to present their cases to the public. It is the media's responsibility to make this possible, and the public's responsibility to review the facts.

If the general public is in fact literate, we must do them the justice of allowing them to read about and evaluate the "great literacy crisis" for themselves.

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APPENDIX

SET OF CONFERENCE MATERIALS PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS — THE ISSUES

Ten Hard Questions:

(1) How is literacy defined?

a - academic literacy?
b - professional and business literacy?
c - functional literacy?

(2) How is the medium of literacy (Standard Written English) defined?

(3) How is literacy measured?

a - by objective tests (norm- and criterion-referenced)?
b - by "holistic" testing?
c - by subjective measures?

(4) What are the effects of the alleged literacy crisis on public policy? What steps are being taken in response to the claim that there is a crisis?

a - at the national level?
b - at the state level?
c - at the local level?

(5) What are the effects of the alleged literacy crisis on people's lives?

(6) How are the media involved with these issues? What part do they play?

(7) Is the Crisis--academic, professional, and/or functional--real?

(8) If it is real, what can and should be done about it?

(9) If it isn't real, how can the myth(s) be laid to rest?

(10) What can or should be the role of the humanists in all this?

We cannot cover all these questions today, and may do little more than touch on some of them. However, the Bibliography and the Resource List in this packet should lead you to further sources of information.

DEFINITIONS OF STANDARD ENGLISH:

1 - Gorrell, R. and C. Laird, 1972. Modern English Handbook. Prentice-Hall.

"Standard English is the language used by educated people, the language that commands respect and esteem, that provides professional status. Nonstandard, sometimes called vulgate, characteristic of the uneducated, is in social disrepute..."

2 - (THE SAME AUTHORS, THE SAME TEXT, IN ITS 1976 EDITION)

"Good English is English that works. ... Standard is used to identify, in a broad way, the kind of language that is necessary for serious purposes, especially in writing."

3 - Morse, J.M., 1973. "The Shuffling Speech of Slavery." College English 34;834-843.

"Standard English is the English in which most of the books, magazines, and newspapers we read are written. The ability to read, write, and speak it is a necessary key to the information and artistry books contain and the conversation they make possible. ... Black English, like silent-majority white English, lacks the vocabulary and the syntactic resources for thought of even moderate complexity."

4 - Conner, J., 1968. A Grammar of Standard English. Houghton Mifflin.

"Formal Written English, the language of the educated community, is not a spoken language. ... It has no local habitation, but is in use wherever educated people use English. The language of every scholarly pursuit, however esoteric its vocabulary and however many special rules in its jargon, is derived from Formal Written English."

5 - Logan, L. and V. Logan, 1967. A Dynamic Approach to Language Arts. McGraw-Hill.

"Standard English is the dialect of educated speakers, those prominent in business, and in public and cultural affairs of the community."

6 - Watkins, F., et al, eds., 1978. Practical English Handbook, 5th Edition. Houghton Mifflin.

"The language in generally accepted use in the English-speaking countries is known as Standard English. It may be characterized as the language of educated persons."

DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY (FUNCTIONAL AND OTHER):

1 - Hillerich, R., 1976. "Towards an Assessable Definition of Literacy." English Journal 65;50-55.

"Literacy is that demonstrated competence in communication skills which enables the individual to function, appropriate to his age, independently in his society and with a potential for movement in that society."

2 - University of Texas research project for the U.S. Office of Education, quoted in U.S. News & World Report for 11/10/75.

"Functional literacy is not simply the ability to read or write at some arbitrarily chosen grade level. The research defines functional literacy as the ability of an adult to apply skills to major knowledge areas regarded as important to successful living."

3 - Cole, G., 1977. "The Chains of Functional Illiteracy." The Education Digest 43;10-13. (And in the AFL-CIO American Federationist.)

"The assumption is that to function competently today, adults must have a minimal ability to communicate by reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They must know some arithmetic, be able to solve problems, and handle personal relationships in the five basic areas of occupational knowledge, consumer economics, health, community resources, and government and law."

4 - San Diego Office of Kelly Girl, personal communication:

All candidates must achieve satisfactory scores on five competency tests. The first is a 100-word spelling test; the second is basic math. Third is a test of filing, which requires candidates to properly assign hypothetical documents to categories. The fourth test is a test of general grammar, in which candidates are expected to find and correct mechanical errors in written materials. Finally, there is a test of penmanship, both cursive and printing.

CRITERIA FOR LITERACY:

1 - McDavid, R., 1969. "Social Dialects and Professional Responsibilities." College English 30;381-385.

> "The percentage of unemployed is probably no greater than the percentage of unfilled jobs; but there is no match, for the unemployed lack the qualifications the new jobs demand: the ability to read with speed and comprehension, the ability to write clear and effective prose, the ability to deal orally with the public in a wide range of situations that demand a mastery of some kind of Standard English."

2 - Parducci, A., Chairman of the Board of Admissions of the University of California, in a letter to the L.A. Times for 11/26/76, set these criteria for high school graduates:

> "1. The ability to write a composition of at least 500 words demonstrating (a) the selection of a main idea and the development of that idea through argument and example; (b) control of diction (appropriate word choice) and clear sentence construction (the avoidance of vagueness and ambiguity); (c) command of mechanics (standard spelling and punctuation).
> 2. The ability to analyze a literary passage, to determine theme and methods of characterization."

3 - From the National Assessment of Educational Progress, summary of their criteria for writing and reading skills.

> The ability to write to communicate adequately (1) in a social situation... (2) in business or vocational situations... (3) in a scholastic situation... The ability to appreciate the value of writing.
>
> Understanding words and word relationships; comprehension of graphic materials; comprehension of written directions; comprehension and knowledge of reference materials; ability to obtain significant facts from written passages; ability to abstract main ideas and organization from written passages; ability to draw inferences from written passages; ability to read with critical understanding.

4 - Criteria of the California Writing Task Force, for a CSUC graduate:

> "...the ability to read and understand a fairly complex question on an intellectually demanding subject and to respond or short notice with a logical, clear, and coherent piece of exposition. The student should be capable of formulating a thesis which can be developed within the time alloted to the assignment, of substantiating that thesis without losing focus or straying from the subject. Both the essay as a whole and individual paragraphs should be unified and coherent and represent adequate development of the central idea. The student should demonstrate knowledge of the principles of logical coordination and subordination and the ability to develop ideas at the level of the sentence rather than by mere accretion of sentences. In addition, the prose of the CSUC graduate should be reasonably free of errors in usage, spelling, and other mechanics..."

SELECTED QUOTES:

Report of the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric of the Harvard College Board of Overseers, 1892:

"It would not seem unreasonable to insist that young men of nineteen years of age who present themselves, for a college education, should be able not only to speak, but to write their mother tongue with ease and correctness. It is obviously absurd that the college--the institution of higher education--should be called upon to turn aside from its proper functions, and devote its means and the time of its instructors to the task of imparting elementary instruction which should be given even in ordinary grammar schools..."

Ward, C., 1917. What is English?

"From every college in the country goes up the cry, 'Our freshmen can't spell, can't punctuate.' Every high school is in despair because its pupils are so woefully ignorant of the merest rudiments. A reformation everywhere is demanded."

Lyons, G., 1976. "The Higher Illiteracy." Harpers for September 1976, page 33.

"The idea of a 'literacy crisis' fits so conveniently the current mood of cultural reaction that one inclines to doubt its validity. ... But even those of us who would prefer to disregard the coming of a plague of semi-literacy must find the evidence persuasive. Consider, for example, the steady drop in the average national score on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test; the fact that nearly half of the entering class at the University of California at Berkeley, a fairly selective school which takes only the top eighth of California high school graduates, failed placement exams and had to be enrolled in remedial composition courses; the news that applicants to journalism programs at Wisconsin, Minnesota, Texas, and North Carolina flunk basic spelling, punctuation, and usage tests at rates that vary between 30 and 50 percent; a survey by the Association of American Publishers showing that college freshmen really do read on what used to be considered a high school freshman level."

Daniels, H., 1976. "Is There a Decline in Literacy?" English Journal 65:17-20.

"In 1710, Jonathan Swift announced in the Tatler that the degeneration of the English language was quickly proceeding, and that only drastic measures could prevent its becoming unintelligible to its own speakers inside of twenty years. Swift appealed to the Lord High Treasurer to set up a panel of scholars and authors to act as arbiters of correctness... Swift's crusade was later taken up by Lord Orrey, who...felt that Swift had saved the tongue from corruption during his age, but that since Swift's death the language had precipitously declined. By 1751, Orrey was convinced that English was poised on the brink of final destruction. Some twenty years later, James Beattie reassessed the situation: English had moved with its customary glory through Orrey's time but was now...threatened with corruption."

SELECTED QUOTES:

Mann, J., in the L.A. Times for 9/4/78, "Court Issue:Workers Test Bosses' Right to Test Them."

"Since 1970, Richard Burger has worked as a power plant operator at Detroit Edison's generating plant here... For the entire time, Burger has been dreaming of becoming an instrument man. It is a cleaner job that would give him more money, more security and regular daytime hours. However, he has no hope of being promoted. Seven years ago, the company gave him a battery of aptitude tests. He failed--or, in the company's words, scored 'not recommended.' Burger, 27, is a man capable of building and wiring his new house, but he admits that he is not so good at multiple choice tests. ... Now, Burger and his union, the Utility Workers of America, are bringing to life the fantasy of millions of test-takers across the United States. In a seven-year legal struggle, they have been challenging--and, so far, defeating--the people who make up multiple choice tests."

Sirotnik, K., in the L.A. Times for 1/10/77, "Educational Testing Methods Flunk Out."

"For example, parents may be told that Mary, their sixth-grader, has received a math score with a percentile rank of 70. That means Mary performed better than 70% of the other students who took that particular standardized test. Actually, Mary's performance was not compared with all the students who took the test, but with the performance of a theoretically representative sample of students, whose results were used to establish the 'norm'. But whether Mary knows what she ought to know is still undetermined. Indeed, based on these standardized tests, no one can tell whether Mary's knowledge of math conforms to any recognized criteria of learning."

Ohmann, R., in The Chronicle of Higher Education for 10/25/76, "The Decline in Literacy Is a Fiction, If Not a Hoax."

"The Educational Testing Service, the Office of Education, and two other organizations sponsored a wide survey of reading test results last year. The researchers found no solid evidence of a decline in reading ability, and concluded this way: 'We are now convinced that anyone who says he knows that literacy is decreasing...is at best unscholarly and at worse dishonest.' Apparently we are, as so often, experiencing a media-created event."

Kumbula, T., in the L.A. Times for 7/24/77, "Illiteracy Creating Problems for Navy."

"Illiteracy has become so serious and so widespread among young Americans here and elsewhere that the Navy is finding it increasingly difficult to find recruits who can function competently in the service. One recent study of 23,000 young recruits at the Navy Recruit Training Center here disclosed that 37% of those tested read below the 10th-grade level."

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Butler, M., ed., 1974. Students' Right to Their Own Language. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Special Issue 25.

Derrick, C., 1964. "Tests of Writing." English Journal 53;496-99.

Goslin, D., 1967. "What's Wrong With Tests and Testing?" College Board Review 65:12-18 and 66:33-37.

Gromman, A., et al, 1976. Reviews of Selected Published Tests in English. NCTE, Urbana, Illinois.

Greer, C. 1973. The Great School Legend. Viking Press, New York.

Houts, P., ed., 1977. The Myth of Measurability. Hart, New York.

Judy, S., 1977. "On Second Thought:Reviewing the SAT Decline." English Journal 66;5-7.

Koerner, J., ed., 1977. The Teaching of Expository Writing. Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, New York.

Morse, J.M., 1972. The Irrelevant English Teacher. Temple University Press.

NCTE, 1975. Common Sense and Testing In English. Urbana, Illinois.

Olson, P., 1976. A View of Power:Four Essays on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.

Shaughnessy, M., 1977. Errors and Expectations:a Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing. Oxford University Press.

Smith, H., 1973. "Standard or Nonstandard:Is There An Answer?" Elementary English 50:225-235.

Williams, F. and J. Whitehead, 1971. "Language in the Classroom: Studies of the Pygmalion Effect." The English Record 21:108-113.

Williams, J., 1975. Testing and the Testing Industry:A Third View. University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.

RESOURCE LIST:

1 - SLATE Newsletter, National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Headquarters, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana IL 61801.

2 - National Center for Education Statistics, 400 Maryland Avenue SW, Washington DC 20202.

3 - RESOURCE, Newsletter of the Instructional Resource Center, City University of New York, 535 East 80th Street, Room 404, NY 10021.

4 - FINDINGS, quarterly newsletter from ETS, Educational Testing Service, Princeton NJ 08540.

5 - CLAC, Newsletter of the Conference on Language Attitudes and Composition, Department of English, Box 751, Portland State University, Portland OR 97207.

6 - National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1500 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 802, Rosslyn VA 22209. (Toll-free 1-800-336-4560)

7 - NEXUS-To-Date, Newsletter of the American Association for Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 780, Washington DC 20063. (Toll-free 1-800-424-9975)

8 - ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, George Washington University, One Dupont Circle, Suite 630, Washington DC 20063.

9 - ERIC Clearinghouse for Reading and Communication Skills, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana IL 61801.

10 - ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurements, and Evaluation, ETS, Princeton NJ 08540.

11 - Interracial Books for Children Bulletin, 1841 Broadway, NY 10023.

12 - NAEP Newsletter, Suite 700, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver CO 80295.

SELECTED STATISTICS:

1 - From the 1975 report prepared by the University of Texas for the U.S. Office of Education, on functional literacy in the United States:

=Only 46% of the adult population is functionally literate
=Breakdown of this statistic shows the following proportions: males, 17%; females, 23%; Anglos, 16%; Blacks, 44%; Spanish-surnamed, 56%; other racial groups, 26%.

(NOTE: This should be compared with the reported U.S. literacy rate of 99% in Rockefeller Foundation's monograph World Military and Social Expenditures, by Ruth Leger Sivard, 1977. Clearly the word "literate" is not defined in the same way in the two studies.)

2 - On the California Bar Examination, for which a passing score is 70, the statistics for passing on first try in 1975 were as follows:

=All candidates, 61%
=Minorities, 28%
=Average Anglo score - 71.05
=Average minority score - 68

3 - From the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' report for August 1978, covering the period from 1960 to 1976:

=Women and minorities are 1/3 less likely than white males to obtain college degrees
=Minority males earn 15% less than comparably educated white males;
=Females of all races earn 30% less than white males
=No change seen in this pattern over the 16-year period

4 - California population report released from Sacramento in June 1977 gives the following breakdown:

=Total population, 24 million
=Chicano population, 4.2 million
=Black population, 1.6 million
=Total minority population, 8.3 million - 34.7%

5 - A 1977 report from the National Center for Education Statistics offers the following breakdown on education professionals:

=Elementary and secondary school principals, 87.3% males
=Elementary and secondary school teachers, only 16.7% males
=Elementary and secondary school teachers, 89% Anglo
=Teacher education students, 91% Anglo

6 - The 1977 report of U.S. doctorates in the sciences, from the National Research Council:

	All	Math	Comp	Phys	Chem	Engr	Med	Biol	Psych
Male	89.7	92.6	93.3	97.3	93.4	99.4	86.1	83.1	76.1
Female	10.3	7.4	6.7	2.7	6.6	0.6	13.9	16.9	23.9
Anglo	89.1	88.7	83.4	88.4	89.7	84.1	87.[illegible]	89.9	92.2
Minority	6.4	5.7	11.0	5.7	6.4	12.2	8.8	5.9	2.7
No Report	4.5	5.6	5.5	5.9	3.9	3.7	3.7	4.2	5.2

(Figures for the humanities are essentially the same, except that the proportion of females is slightly higher.)

[San Diego County]

Manpower Statistics: 1970 Census

	White	Black	Other Races	Spanish American	Minority Total
Total Population	1,251,801 (92.2%)	[106,053 (7.8% ----------)]		174,209 (12.8%)	N/A
Pop. 16 - 21 years	181,013 (14,5%)	10,506 (16.9%)	6,273 (14.2%)		
Labor 16+ yrs Total	431,697 (89.4%)	17,386 (6.6%)	10,596 (4.0%)	53,490 (7.5%)	81,472 (18.1%)
" " Employed	404,901 (94.0%)	15,753 (3.6%)	9,841 (2.3%)	49,408 (11.5%)	75,002 (17.4%)
" " Unemployed	25,122 (91.8%)	1,604 (5.6%)	359 (2.6%)	2,570 (14.0%)	4,533 (22.2%)
Unemployment Rate	6.2%	9.4%	7.1%	7.6%	7.9%
Enrolled in School	57,103 (92.1%)	2,850 (4.6%)	2,072 (3.3%)	8,798 (14.2%)	13,720 (22.1%)
Prof.&Tech. Workers	77,142 (96.0%)	1,627 (2.0%)	1,596 (2.0%)	5,302 (6.6%)	8,525 (10.6%)
Physicians/Dentists and Related	3,607 (97.7%)	24 (0.6%)	62 (1.7%)	177 (4.8%)	263 (7.1%)
Medical & Health except Doctors	7,172 (92.2%)	277 (3.6%)	325 (4.2%)	621 (8.0%)	1,223 (15.7%)
Teachers, Elementary and Secondary	14,998 (96.3%)	389 (2.5%)	192 (1.2%)	941 (5.9%)	1,495 (9.6%)

NOTE: There is a total of +100% in some cases, as "The Spanish-American Ethnic Group (which) can include 'Whites', 'Blacks', and other races" has been counted twice in some cases. I found the variance to be about .05% in most cases.

Vol. 2, No. 3 March 1977

SLATE

Support for Learning and Teaching of English

STANDARDIZED TESTING: HOW TO READ THE RESULTS

The Issues

Standardized tests continue to loom very large in decision-making processes affecting the world of English teaching. Serious consequences arise from "misreadings" of standardized test results: unwarranted inferences and conclusions about student learning, teacher performance, and curriculum change accrue from misconceptions about the nature and the meaning of results from standardized, multiple-choice tests. In order to counter misuses of such tests, English teachers need to become "close readers" of standardized tests and the manuals accompanying them.

Professional Viewpoints and Research

Several research studies have indicated that many professionals (teachers, counselors, administrators, and education agency officials) are relatively naive about the limitations and appropriate uses of standardized test results. David Goslin's survey of teachers and counselors in 75 secondary schools found most of the teachers to be relatively uninformed; similar findings emerged in a companion study of teachers in 800 elementary schools (*Teachers and Testing*. N.Y.: Russell Sage Foundation, 1967). Examining uses of standardized test data by Michigan administrators and education agencies, House, Rivers, and Stufflebeam reported a number of questionable practices in the development and use of standardized tests in the Michigan Accountability System. These investigators found "serious errors" in the use of test results, reflected in such practices as: (1) tying district funding to the gain scores of low achievers, (2) using test scores as a major criterion in evaluating teacher performance, and (3) interpreting test scores as if they were literal indicators of what is taught and learned in school. House, Rivers, and Stufflebeam's expert opinion about the effectiveness of standardized tests as measures of school learning is especially illuminating:

> Test results are not good measures of what is taught in school, strange as it may seem. They are good indicators of socioeconomic class and other variables. But, unless one teaches the tests themselves, they are not very sensitive to school learning. (*Phi Delta Kappan* 55:10 [1974], 663-69.)

Ronald P. Carver demonstrates in another study why achievement tests are inappropriate measures of school learning. In his appraisal of the standardized tests used in the famous Coleman Report (the STEP Tests), Carver explains that these tests, designed according to traditional test-making principles, eliminated those items that all students got correct during development of the tests. Even though these items might be very good measures of achievement, they would be very poor items for producing variations in student performance. Hence, the "good" achievement test that is built upon psychometric principles is not set up to reveal what "everybody knows" about a subject; rather it is arranged to maximize variation in performance in order to produce student rankings. Carver concludes that achievement tests so constructed actually emphasize *aptitude* instead of *achievement*. (*American Educational Research Journal* 5:1 [1975], 77-86.)

A growing national concern over widespread misuses of standardized tests has led representatives of 40 major educational organizations to organize a National Symposium on Testing under the auspices of the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. This group, with which NCTE is affiliated, hopes to undertake a massive national study of the construction, the content, the use, and the effects of various standardized tests, if it can find funding sources.

Strategies for Action

Countering the excesses and abuses in the use of standardized measures requires two steps: (1) self-instruction in the "basics" of scientific measurement; (2) public exposure of the fallibility of standardized tests and of the injuries their misuse may cause.

The person made uneasy by the language of mathematics and confused by statistical reporting schemes can begin to make sense of the matter by consulting NCTE's brief booklet on *Common Sense and Testing in English*. Here the complexities of standardized testing procedures are explained clearly in non-technical ways; limits and dangers of testing are identified; alternatives are proposed; patterns for reporting test results to the public are suggested.

The second strategy for action—uncovering the fallibility of standardized tests—will take up the rest of this brief report.

Measurement in education is not an exact science. We must never forget that statements about "achievements" in learning made in the language of mathematics, like statements made in everyday speech, are only *approximately* true within *defined limits*. There is no such thing as error-free measurement in physical science or in the human "sciences." Lancelot Hogben points out in *Mathematics for the Millions* that correct measurements cannot be represented by a single number; true measurement involves the statement of two limits, between which the "real" value can be expected to fall. This principle obviously has implications for reporting test results.

Errors may enter into any phase of the standardized testing enterprise: (1) in selecting the sample of language "behaviors" to be measured; (2) in creating and keying test items; (3) in administering the test; (4) in scoring it by hand or machine; (5) in interpreting test results. It is therefore essential to consider all potential sources of error when using any particular standardized

test *before* deciding whether its results are dependable. Once the "human" errors in making and using standardized tests are detected, we still are left with "chance" error, which is invariably present in statistically treated data. A statement of the chance factor, called the "standard error of measurement," should accompany any report of an individual test score. Otherwise, serious misinterpretation of scores will occur. The more responsible companies make clear in their manuals how "obtained" scores will vary through pure chance, but sometimes this information is inaccessible to teachers, being buried in technical manuals in the test administrator's office.

Educational Testing Service does present, in readily available manuals, non-technical explanations of the error factor. On their Scholastic Aptitude Test, for example, if a student's "obtained" score is 600, the odds are 2 to 3 that his or her "true" score will fall between 570 and 630. In other words, if this student were to take this same test again, the chances are 2 out of 3 that the score obtained would fall somewhere within this 60 point range. There is still another error factor to "read" into a comparison of the scores of two persons. The "standard error of the difference" on the SAT indicates that a 72 point difference between two persons' scores on the math section or a 66 point difference on the verbal section is so statistically insignificant that "it cannot be taken seriously." In regard to error of measurement, House, Rivers, and Stufflebeam make the point that even on "highly reliable" tests, individual gain scores "can and do fluctuate wildly for no apparent reason by as much as a full grade-equivalent unit." The implication of this characteristic of standardized test results is clear: *decisions based on test results must take into account measurement error. Scores unaccompanied by measurement error data should be rejected.*

Let us now move one step back to see what lies behind the test score: what goes into a standardized test score? In a standardized reading test, for example, various kinds of test items are bunched together under broad headings such as "vocabulary" or "comprehension." The "raw" score (before it is transformed into grade level equivalents or some other scale) is often the sum of the correct answers, regardless of the level of thinking each item may require. In accumulating the points that make up a reading comprehension score, all responses are counted as equal, whether the item required a high level generalization or merely an act of literal recall. The same score can be achieved by countless combinations of right answers. Thus, a single, uninterpreted score reveals nothing of the strengths or weaknesses that produced the comprehension score.

Let us suppose that we have a mini-comprehension test with only 10 items. Two people each make scores of 7 on the test. The score "7" could be achieved by any of 120 different combinations of answers (according to a mathematician). There is never a guarantee that identical scores arise from the same sequences of performance or that they represent the same pools of knowledge. Yet, identical scores on standardized tests are equated, and educational decisions are made upon the basis of this falsely assumed equivalency. People rarely see any need to ask the question, "*Which* seven questions did the person get correct?"

It is important to remember that test scores are summations. Once the summation is made, important differential information (often the really meaningful, individualizing information) is lost. Even computerized readouts of all right/wrong responses do not provide the truly significant differential information. Even with the item-by-item record of right/wrong responses, we still do not know the "logic" of the error. A recent *Peanuts* cartoon epitomizes the "logic" of the wrong response, of the potential mismatch between the intent of the question-maker and the perception of the answer-giver. In one panel we see Peppermint Patty musing over the teacher's question, "What was the author's purpose in writing the story?" In the next panel comes Patty's reply, "Maybe he needed the money." Deborah Meier's *Reading Failure and the Tests* (New York, N.Y.: Workshop Center for Open Education, 1973) provides a sobering record of what happened when third grade children in PS 144, Manhattan, were asked what particular questions meant to them in the 1970 and 1971 Metropolitan Achievement Tests. The reasons for their "wrong" answers actually make very good sense, exposing levels of comprehension hidden by right/wrong tabulations.

The final topic of this report deals with the major issue in reading the results of any standardized test: How closely does the content of the test fit the program of instruction? Any standardized test of 85 to 150 items is only a sampling of a universe of instruction. So the question of the adequacy of the sample inevitable arises: that is, is this test a representative sample of the behaviors it purports to measure, in terms of the emphases in instruction in a particular classroom or school district? Consider, for example, the typical "Test of Written Expression," where the only things measured are the things that happen *inside* sentences. Often taken by the public and some members of the profession as a true test of composition, it may dwell on the improprieties of "lie/lay," "who/whom," "couldn't hardly," and other mechanical problems. The class that has concentrated on the real tasks of writing (selecting a subject, pursuing a specific intention, addressing a particular audience) may suffer a disadvantage in such a narrow sampling of "written expression." Richard Braddock (in Gommon, 1976) raises an interesting question about these "objective" tests of writing when he asks, "What is the difference between a test of reading ability and a multiple-choice test of 'writing ability'?" A "good reading" of the results of standardized tests in English requires one to determine whether the labels on tests and the content of the items have any significant bearing on the domain they purport to measure.

A person can, of course, perform poorly on a standardized test. But, sometimes, what appears to be poor performance actually is an artifact of the test structure and content, or a misreading of the test results. We need to be able to distinguish one condition from the other. We need then to become better readers of test results and thus wiser consumers of commercially prepared "one-right-answer" standardized tests.

Leo Ruth
(For the SLATE Steering Committee)

Resources

American Psychological Association. *Standards for Educational & Psychological Tests.* Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1974.

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Samuda, Ronald. *Psychological Testing of American Minorities: Issues and Consequences.* New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975.

SLATE Starter Sheets are offered as part of the Newsletter series as resources for dealing with current issues affecting the teaching of English language arts. Reproduce these sheets and use them to help promote better understanding of the goals of English teaching.

SLATE Newsletter is sent to individuals who contribute $5 or more to support the activities of the SLATE Steering Committee. Send your contribution to NCTE/SLATE, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, Illinois 61801.

SYMPOSIUM EVALUATION

We would like to know how this symposium has affected your thinking about the literacy issue. Listed below are several questions that ask about your opinions prior to attending the symposium. These questions are followed by a set that inquire about your current thoughts on and feelings about the issue. Feel free to respond to the questions with as much detail as you choose. We also welcome any additional comments you care to make about the symposium. If you need additional space, continue your comments on the other side of the page. Thank you for your participation and for sharing your reactions with us.

1. Before you attended this conference, did you believe there was a literacy crisis?

2. What information sources had an affect on your opinions about the literacy issue?

3. What were your reasons for attending? What did you expect to learn?

.....
.....

4. Do you now feel that there is a literacy crisis?

5. How has this program changed or influenced your thinking?

6. What program participant(s) seemed particularly well informed?

7. In general, did the speakers present information that you hadn't thought of before?

SYMPOSIUM EVALUATION (Continued)

8. Was there any line of thinking about the issue that you feel was not given adequate attention?

9. Did you feel as if you had ample opportunity to discuss matters that were of importance to you?

10. If you had the opportunity to change something about this symposium, what would you change?

11. Do you feel as if this symposium provided a worthwhile experience for you?

12. Please circle any of the following groups to which you belong.

SDSU Faculty or Administration	League of Women Voters
Community School District	PTA
School Board	Other Community Groups Specify _____

Signature (optional) _____